FT MEADE
GenColl



"Mother," said Marie, as she placed the twins in Madam Dalbau's lap, "I bring you two more children."

THE

BETTER PART.

A TALE FROM REAL LIFE.

mme Valentine Vattier d'Ambrugeac

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY

THE LADY BLANCHE MURPHY.

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THE BETTER PART.

PART FIRST.

I.

THE early beams of a hot July sun shed their cheerful light on a garret of the Rue Basse, at Rennes, where a young girl of sixteen sat by the window, sewing busily. Another girl, somewhat older, was lying on a plain walnut bed, which stood at the further end of the room, shrouded by calico curtains.

Every thing about this unpretending room was poor—indeed, it hardly contained the barest necessaries of life. An unstained deal table, four coarse straw chairs, and a window-curtain with green serge—that was all. And yet the garret, spite of its evident poverty, presented a cheerful sight enough. The utmost neatness prevailed; the uncarpeted floor was scrupulously clean; the walls, carefully whitewashed, had lost none of their freshness, while the window, veiled as it

was with scarlet-runners, morning-glories, and nasturtiums—those unfailing friends of the poor—admitted a softened light, together with the sweet and suggestive perfume of mignonette.

The modest apartment seemed to owe its cheerful aspect and the blessing on its occupants to the little image of the Blessed Virgin, which stood on the mantelpiece, together with a china holy-water font and two blue glass vases full of flowers.

Noisily the bells of the parish-church of St. Stephen clanged out the hour of six. The sleeper started slightly, and stretching her arms, querulously exclaimed,

"How badly I have slept, to be sure! and that horrid clock must needs wake me up before the time. Where are you, Marie?"

"Here, Martha dear; I am at work."

What, already?"

"Did you not hear six o'clock strike just now? You know the shop opens at seven, and I had promised Mother Yvonne that her summer jacket should be finished yesterday."

"And so it is for Mother Yvonne that you get up before daylight, and sit up half the night, at the risk of falling ill."

"Do we not owe a great deal to that kind old woman? What should we have done without her help? But let us drop the subject, Martha

dear, since we can not agree upon it. Let us think of our breakfast, for I have done now. I'll lay the table while you dress."

With these words, Marie cheerfully drew the table forward, and placed upon it a few cheap fruits, some bread and butter, and a certain milky product known as "curds and whey." Marie, indeed, did honor to this early breakfast; but Martha was still too drowsy to feel hungry, and her face wore a discontented and constrained expression.

"O dear!" she yawned, "how wearied I am of this tiresome life of ours; always this wretched sameness, this hard necessity of unceasing work! I believe I shall die of sheer *ennui*, if nothing happens soon to relieve this dreadful monotony."

"But, dearest, what do you find so very dreadful in our life? True, we are obliged to work, but we are not the only ones in the same predicament. We have never really wanted for any thing as yet, thank God! My tastes are so simple that if on Sundays I can reckon on a walk in the country, after mass, I feel quite contented. What more do we want?"

"Ah! I should have recollected that your tastes and mine do not harmonize. I can not, for my part, endure such monotony. My mind, of a higher stamp than yours, carries me away and shuts out from my sight any but the poetic

phases of life. You have not been blessed with my beauty, and therefore can not understand what I feel when I see the best years of my life slip by in such loneliness."

"Loneliness, Martha, when you have a sister! Darling, do you love me no longer, or have I done any thing to vex you?"

"No, you are kind to me, Marie; but I say it again, you can not understand nor share my feelings. I feel an eager desire to change this life for a very different one; to pass into circles where work is not obligatory, and where one's days can be spent in the delights of poetic intercourse and intellectual friendship."

"My poor Martha, I hope that God may never grant your prayer, for you might bitterly repent it some day. I have always thought that happiness consisted in being able to regulate our tastes according to the position in which it has pleased Providence to place us. No, I am not beautiful, I know it, and do not crave for flattery and admiration, but still I feel the want of intellectual companionship as much as you do. I used to think, Martha dear, that no real friendship could exist save between two sisters, and I often thanked God for having given me a sister, to make up for the loss of our dear parents, of whom you so often remind me. But now I see that my love is not enough for you, and although

I grieve to know what I had already begun to suspect, still I love you well enough to hope that if your wishes are ever realized, they may not entail upon you both disappointment and despair, the natural consequences of a mistaken view of life."

"I see you know Monsieur l'Abbé de Surville's sermons to me by heart. But never mind; something tells me that a lucky change will take place in my life soon, and for the sake of my good fortune, I will forgive your preaching."

Marie was silent, but a tear glistened in her eye, and as if to hide her feelings, she busied herself in putting things to rights. Then with a loving kiss, she left her sister and went quickly out of the room.

Martha leaned wearily out of the window, and reasoned thus to herself, after Marie had left her alone,

"How simple my sister must be, and how narrow-minded she is! How otherwise can she be happy in this wretched garret, having once known wealth? O high fortune, poetry of life, what is there lacking in me that forbids me to aspire to your delights? Have I not beauty and intellect? Yes, beauty!" she added as she looked at herself in a little mirror that hung near the window-frame. "How many women reared in wealth and flattery have neither the grace of

my figure nor the charm of my expression! And why should all this be wasted, why should I spend my life unknown to the world, with no companions but my quiet sister, old Mother Yvonne, and the Abbé Surville, who is always lecturing me. I *must* lead a different life, and I even feel myself equal to any undertaking that may be necessary to win this position. Only Paris, that unapproachable capital, can offer me a career worthy of my talents. Why am I not already there? Would to God that my presentiment were a true one!"

Martha thus allowed her imagination to carry her away, and she never noticed how the morning hours were gliding away too; but while she follows her vagrant thoughts, let us stop to explain how it was that she and her sister, while still so young, found themselves the arbiters of their own destinies.

II.

MONSIEUR DELMAS, an honest and intelligent man, had begun life as a workman. His steadiness and economy had soon drawn his master's attention, and as the latter was a rich man, and fully appreciated Delmas's good qualities, he was at first raised to the position of foreman, and when old age made his employer feel the need of rest, the continuance of the business was made over to him.

The young man's good reputation and the position he had won for himself enabled him to make a good marriage in the eyes of the world. His domestic happiness was untroubled, for his gentle and loving wife could always make him forget at home the feverish worry that is inseparable from business abroad. At first, fortune smiled upon him, and he made money rapidly. Three years after their marriage, Martha's birth further gladdened Monsieur and Madame Delmas, and eighteen months later, another daughter, Marie, was born to them. Surrounded by a certain amount of luxury, and carefully watched over by their lov-

ing parents, the two girls grew up to the respective ages of ten and twelve. The older was a lovely child. Her delicate oval face shone forth from a glory of magnificent fair hair; her complexion was faultless in its admirable blending of color; and a freak of nature had endowed her with a pair of large black eyes, shaded by long eyelashes equally jetty.

Marie was less favored by nature. Her large, irregular features were far from pleasing, especially at first sight, yet on further inspection, one could not help thinking her charming. What confirmed this idea was an expression of goodness and sweetness which lighted up her face, and shone in her black eyes, fully as beautiful as her sister's, but surpassing them in their look of cheerful, well-tempered gayety.

The two girls, thus outwardly dissimilar, were morally not less unlike each other. Marie was affectionate and grateful; her greatest happiness consisted in deserving her parents' caresses, and giving them pleasure by her conduct. Her instinct taught her what most delighted her mother's heart, and though so young, she was almost Madame Delmas's *friend*.

Martha, on the contrary, needed a judicious and severe rule. She manifested a selfishness that knew no bounds; she cared for nothing but the notice which her father's customers

openly took of her beauty. As quick-witted as her sister, she nevertheless turned to a very different use the education which they both received at the best school at Rennes. Marie, who was painstaking and earnest in her studies, turned her mind to all the more solid branches of knowledge, while Martha, caring for nothing but outward accomplishments, studied music and drawing in the most superficial manner, and though possessed of real talent for both arts, derived no benefit from the lessons she took in them. When, at fifteen, she was able to draw a classic profile with tolerable accuracy, play a new sonata at sight without stumbling over too many tough passages, and sing a sentimental *romance* without breaking down, she considered herself a finished artist, and utterly neglected the rigorous practice which alone could have perfected her in these studies. Her mother would fain have tried to counteract her unfortunate tendencies, but Madame Delmas's health was too delicate to allow her to exert herself with impunity; and the reverses that speedily overwhelmed the family put an end to any hopes she might have had of undertaking such a task.

Monsieur Delmas's business suffered from the political agitation of the years 1846 and '47; several of his speculations ended in undoubted losses, and the political horizon, darkening every day,

threatened to make these losses permanent. His wife bravely bore up under the first shock, and by her attitude succeeded in cheering his heart a little. Her hopes, however, were delusive; 1848 came, and her husband, already weakened by his previous losses, and seeing no way of meeting his engagements, endeavored, on the strength of his unstained and well-known reputation, to contract a loan which should enable him to weather the storm. The panic was too universal, and the scared bankers would not accept even his security, so that it soon became with him a question either of a dishonorable failure or the sacrifice of his personal position.

Between the two, his choice never wavered for one moment. With his wife's cordial consent, for she generously understood her sad duty, he sold his private possessions—house, furniture, plate, every thing, even to his wife's costliest garments. He was thus able to satisfy every creditor in full, and by the middle of June, the family settled down in a modest little apartment of the Rue Basse, the remainder of their fortune scarcely amounting to two thousand francs.

The unhappy father was broken-hearted; in vain he tried to work and begin anew; his health gave way, and by September, he was dead. His widow resolved to live for her children's sake, and with the help of her youngest daughter, who

evinced a fortitude beyond her years, she set up as a seamstress and embroideress, and toiled for six months at this dreary and unprofitable labor. Martha, meanwhile, was selfishly cast down by her troubles, and while her mother and sister worked hard for their living, spent her own time in vain complainings and lamentations. One friend did not desert the unfortunate family. This was the Abbé Surville, a kind priest, who often came to comfort them, and sought, by every delicate means in his power, to relieve their poverty. Knowing Marie's good qualities, he endeavored to stir up her sister to imitate them. He succeeded in procuring a few pupils for Martha, but the young girl's selfishness and indolence soon taught her to think her part in the work too toilsome, and the result of her negligence was that she found herself reduced, in a very short time, to one pupil only.

In February, 1849, Madame Delmas's health succumbed under the double burden of anxiety and work. She fell ill of congestion of the lungs. Marie nursed her most devotedly, and when, after a fortnight's sickness, the poor mother breathed her last, she did so with her eyes fixed on her youngest daughter's face, which to the last gasp was faithfully near her, the symbol of consolation and hope. This terrible blow roused Martha from her supineness, and for a

time caused her the most bitter grief, but her selfishness soon regained the upper hand, and she contemplated her future with mean dread. She was sixteen, her sister not yet fifteen, and their whole capital amounted to two hundred francs. The good priest came to their help in this emergency, and advised them to leave their neat little apartment for the tiny garret in which our story first presented them to the reader. They kept nothing save their most indispensable belongings, and still, by the Abbé Surville's advice, they placed their money in a savings-bank.

Marie found a place as seamstress in a large dress-making establishment, where her mistress, delighted with her eagerness and amiability, gave her very fair wages.

Martha had only her solitary pupil, but she felt no shame at contributing such an inadequate sum to their common fund, and did not even scruple to repine at her circumstances, her privations, and even the very necessity for work. Marie bore patiently with these lamentations, cheerfully worked for both, and always showed herself as kind and affectionate to her sister as the latter was impatient and ill-tempered toward herself.

A poor woman who gained her livelihood by spinning, and rented the adjoining garret to that of the Delmas girls, took a sudden liking to the gentle Marie, and often did the sisters a hundred

little kindnesses. This was the woman we have heard of as Mother Yvonne. Martha had been ill for a short time, and to save Marie the task of nursing her, and thereby losing her place at the shop, Yvonne had volunteered to watch by the sick-bed altogether, refusing any pay for her services. Marie never forgot her disinterestedness, and being deeply grateful, endeavored to recompense her by an almost filial devotion. Martha, on the other hand, quickly lost sight of all she owed her, and thought it quite beneath her to notice the poor old woman.

This had been the sisters' life for upward of eighteen months, and while, as we have already seen, Marie, in her brave and cheerful spirit, never complained of any hardship, Martha was selfishly wrapped up in her wish for a change that was only to benefit herself, and quite overlooked her sister, to whom in reality she owed so much.

III.

It was the evening of the same day on which the two sisters had held the above-mentioned conversation. Marie was waiting supper for Martha, and was even beginning to feel anxious, so long had her sister overstopped her customary hour for her return home. She had almost decided to go out and look for her, when Martha entered the room, in evident agitation. She threw herself on Marie's neck, and in a sobbing voice cried out,

"Marie, I am going away at last. Oh! I am so glad!"

"What do you mean, dear?"

"I am going to Paris."

"To Paris!" echoed Marie, in dismay; "it can not be."

"Sister, hear, and fancy my delight. Madame la Comtesse de Kerbriant was with her daughter during the lesson to-day; she has never been with us before. She noticed my sadness, and kindly asked me why I grieved. I told her about our circumstances, our poverty, and my

desire to make for myself a position better befitting my tastes. She listened very kindly, and then asked me if I thought I could take charge of a young girl's whole education. I told her that I thought myself equal to the undertaking. 'Well, then,' she answered, 'your face pleases me, and I should like you to owe the accomplishment of your desires to me. It would be a pity to let such beauty as yours "waste its sweetness on the desert air." Be my daughter Irene's governess: we shall start for Paris in a week, if you can be ready by that time.' I was beside myself with joy, and bathed her hands with my tears. I was introduced to the count, her husband, who quite acquiesced in the arrangement. My presentiment is fulfilled, and I am certain of success. I shall actually be in Paris in a few days."

Marie was speechless with sorrow and amazement.

"What!" she asked at last, "did you promise before you could ask the Abbé de Surville's advice?"

"Oh! indeed! that he might have the opportunity of preventing me from giving the promise, and of lecturing me again on the hundred and one gentle qualities which he so admires in me. I am eighteen now, and old enough to take care of myself. I did not choose to let my *one* opportunity slip by."

"I have heard the Abbé de Surville say, that a governess's position is a very trying one. Have you any idea, Martha dear, what duties you will be called upon to fulfill?"

"Marie, if I do not choose to listen to our old friend's remonstrances, much less do I feel inclined to hear yours. My resolve is taken, and I mean to go. Thank God, this horrid garret will not afflict my eyes any longer. My new home is just what I dreamt of, sister. My father's house was handsome enough; but compared with the magnificence of Kerbriant House, it was almost mean. The countess tells me that their Paris house is far finer yet than the one she lives in here, and I am to have my own rooms there. How happy I shall be!"

"But with all that splendor, you will not find the sweetness of home, Martha. Madame de Kerbriant's slightest caprice may one day send you back to a position much less secure than even what you now possess and despise; for in Paris you would have neither relations nor friends to go to in case of need."

Marie paused for a moment, then sadly added these words, in a low tone,

"Martha, my darling, how can you think of leaving me, I who care for nothing but lightening your burden and making life happier to you? Oh! why can not I win for you, by my own work,

that wealth and position that you long for? fear so many sorrows, so many disappointments for you in the life you are choosing. Stay with me, sister; nobody will ever love you more than I do, and is not a devoted love life's best boon? You can not love me if you want to leave me."

"You know I love you, Marie, you know it well, but you want to exact from me even the sacrifice of my life's happiness. Only an intellectual career can satisfy me, but you are seemingly content with obscure drudgery. I consent to admire your conduct, but for heaven's sake do not ask me to imitate it."

"May you be happy, Martha dear, that is all I care for, but I trust that the brilliant opening you have now secured may never turn to a bitter disappointment in the end."

The week passed quickly by; Martha spent all her time looking over her plain wardrobe, and making what little additions she could to it, so as not to present herself before her noble patroness in too pitiful a guise. Notwithstanding her aching heart, Marie helped her willingly, but never ceased begging of her not to go. The Abbé Surville endeavored, on his side, to prove to the impulsive girl that she was mistaken concerning the advantages which she expected from her new career. Both tender entreaty and prudent advice were in vain; Martha was immova-

ble. The long-wished-for day came at last, and Madame de Kerbriant's carriage was sent to fetch Mademoiselle Delmas.

Martha was radiant; she hastily kissed her sister, bowed to the venerable priest, who had insisted upon seeing the last of her, shook hands condescendingly with old Yvonne, and got into the carriage with an air of relief and of triumph.

"You will write to me often, won't you?" asked Marie, with tears streaming down her cheeks.

"Of course I shall, dear sister, you will see. I shall not be remiss in my correspondence. Do not cry so, please, else I might cry for sympathy, and I should not like the countess to think that I am going with her against my will. I shall be back in a few months. Give me another kiss, and let us think of our future meeting."

The carriage disappeared from sight, and Marie, supported by the good priest, went back to her garret, which seemed to her too large for herself alone, and where she gave way unrestrainedly to her sore grief.

"Let us pray, my child," said the Abbé Surville; "your poor sister needs the protection of Providence more than ever; but the Queen of Heaven is never appealed to in vain. Let us pray, therefore."

And while Martha vainly entertains dreams

of grandeur and magnificence, Marie, kneeling before the image of the Blessed Virgin, beseeches the Mother of God to watch over her sister, and ward off from her the dangers that threaten her soul.

IV.

"RENNES, October 1, 1851.

"DEAREST MARTHA: Have you forgotten me? It is two whole months since you left, and I have not heard a word yet. Can it be that you are ill?

"How impatiently I watch the postman every morning, hoping that he brings me a letter from my sister! When he passes by and brings me nothing, tears dim my sight, and I feel more lonely than ever. Rennes seems like a desert; my thoughts fly to Paris, to my forgetful Martha, with whom I am always in heart and spirit.

"Our poor little room seems so large and bare now that I have not you to share it with me. And how sad it seems too! The window that was once so profusely adorned with mignonette, nasturtiums, morning-glories, and scarlet-runners, is quite bare now. Since you left, I have been so taken up with my grief that I have neglected our poor flowers, and this morning I found nothing but faded leaves and dried-up stalks. I was sorry, and upbraided myself for this

neglect; but more sorrowful thoughts than ever intruded themselves on my mind. Do help me to chase them away, at least by telling me that you are still happy.

"Monsieur l'Abbé Surville came to see me yesterday; we talked of you the whole time—indeed, I could not have broached any other subject. This kind friend of ours sends you the most affectionate messages. He feels all a father's solicitude for you, and will be so glad if you can tell us that you are happy. I hope, dear sister, that you will not neglect writing to him.

"Even old Yvonne inquires after you every day; poor thing! she is truly fond of you, though you always treated her so coldly. Martha dear, I think Paris will never furnish you with such devoted friends as those you have left behind you. Your departure made us wretched enough, and now your apparent neglect wounds us still more.

"Do not refuse us the comfort and delight of knowing that you still love us a little, and, above all, remember your devoted sister,

"MARIE."

"PARIS, October 14, 1851.

"OH! how large and beautiful a city Paris is, dear Marie! How shall I describe the grandeur of this unrivaled city, its splendid palaces, its

picturesque gardens, and, above all, the brilliancy and the ever-varying aspect of the crowd that always throngs the large streets!

"How different is this activity to the stagnant life that distinguishes our old Breton capital! Life at Rennes is smothered in an atmosphere of old-fashioned prejudices, and is spent in sordid, material cares. But in Paris! the benumbed intellect awakens; the world of poetry and art hastens to meet it—at last, this is *life*.

"Such is my own history, Marie. I was plunged in the Slough of Despond, and suffered bitterly from the cramped existence we were forced to lead; but the trial is over now, and I have found my level.

"Our journey was prosperous. The count and countess are kindness itself to me, and my little pupil can not find ways enough to prove to me how pleased she is at being intrusted to my sole guidance. The house in which we live stands in the most courtly quarter of Paris, the Faubourg Saint-Germain. The entrance is on Rue de Babylone. The great gates open into a large courtyard, with orange and lemon-trees planted in green tubs. A flight of steps leads up to the house-door. From this side, the building looks somewhat grim, but it is lovely from the garden side. On the ground floor is a large hall paved with marble, leading to the dining-room and

three immense drawing-rooms. The dining-room is paneled in old carved oak; the ceiling is frescoed, and represents hunting, fishing, and vintage scenes. In the four corners, alabaster statues support rich candelabra, while a crystal chandelier of marvelous workmanship hangs from the centre of the ceiling. The window-curtains are of purple silk damask, and there are two large antique sideboards loaded with old plate and rare glass. A state dinner in this hall is really a sight worth seeing. I was lucky enough to witness the sight only three weeks after my arrival. One of the drawing-rooms is furnished in blue silk damask, with here and there Venetian mirrors let in, and divided into panels by thin gilt rods. The second room is furnished in green velvet, and the third in crimson velvet. The oak floor is covered with rich carpets. Magnificent as are these rooms, they are far outdone by the countess's boudoir, to which only the intimate friends of the family have access. You can not fancy any thing more original, and at the same time more lovely, than this boudoir. The walls are paneled in lacquer, on whose black, shining background the most delightful, fresh-looking paintings stand quaintly out. A thousand rare fancy articles strew the pretty *étagères*, and the room is lighted by Chinese lanterns. A silver cornice,

supported by caryatides, runs round the ceiling, which is painted the same as the walls. The curtains and furniture are of black satin, brocaded with brilliant flower-patterns. The black marble chimney-piece, in the Renaissance style, has a set of silver ornaments, and the windows are all of stained glass.

"On the first floor are the count and countess's private apartments, and my pupil and I live on the second floor. I have an anteroom, with a dressing-room to the right; to the left, a drawing-room, a small study, and a bedroom. All the rooms are furnished in gray chintz, strewn with bouquets of rosebuds. A splendid pianoforte stands in the drawing-room. My windows look into the garden—a spacious and beautiful one. You see, dear Marie, that I am living in a real palace; and yet I have not mentioned a gallery full of old pictures, all the best masters being represented there; or a collection of antiquities, and one of natural history, which are Monsieur de Kerbriant's special pride, and the delight of the *savants* and artists whom he loves to have around him.

"This state is easily kept up by an immense fortune, which will be increased some day by the death of Monsieur de Kerbriant's father, an old gentleman over eighty; and to all this my pupil Irene is the sole heiress!

"Ah! why are such riches given to some, and such disproportionate poverty to others? Those who possess these advantages are generally the least worthy of them; certainly, Irene is the most commonplace child I ever knew. She has no beauty and very little mind.

"Her mother is full of my praises, and willingly leaves the child to my care. Monsieur de Kerbriant is most courteous in his behavior, and even the lady's-maid is civil and confidential, and tells me all her little troubles, as she sits in my room at her sewing. She is eager to anticipate my wants, and I never have to give an order twice.

"I have been in Paris two whole months, and I have had nothing to do as yet but accompany Madame de Kerbriant in her drives and her visits to the different shops. She thinks highly of my good taste, and always asks my advice about her dress. Yesterday, she was kind enough to say that she wished me to be her friend. So you see that I have every reason to be content with my lot. I would willingly write to the abbé, but this letter is already a long one, and I have to help Madame de Kerbriant to prepare for a great party to-night. But it is not a thing neglected, only put off. Pray, thank him for his kind remembrances and intentions. If I did not follow his advice, it was only because I saw

that he did not understand my character, and, I am sure, he will agree with me now that God has bestowed upon me the better part. Good-by, dear sister; I wish you all possible happiness, for I love you very dearly.

"Your affectionate sister,

"MARTHA DELMAS."

V.

MARIE sits by the garret-window, with her sister's letter held listlessly in her hands, while great tears course down her cheeks. She is fearfully changed, poor girl! her fresh color has gone, her eyes have lost their brightness and seem marked with an ominous shadow; her features are sharpened and attenuated. Yvonne tries her simple consolations in vain, and gazes on the young girl with something like anxiety.

"Do you feel well, mademoiselle?" she asks, "you look wearied. It is a long time since you got up, and you should not be so imprudent. The doctor told me not to let you sit up longer than two hours at a time."

"I am quite well, Mother Yvonne," answered Marie in a weak voice, "and the weather is so fine that a little air will do me good. I am not ill now, this letter has quite cured me; for does not Martha assure me that she loves me truly?"

"Oh! yes, I dare say she loves you; but all

the same it was her neglect of her promise to write which was the cause of your sickness. You say this letter has cured you; but why do you cry so sorely when you look at it?"

"It is only my foolishness, my poor Yvonne. I always forget how different my sister is from myself, and I should have liked to find her a little more demonstrative in her affection."

"You are so good, Mademoiselle Marie, that I can not imagine how your sister had the heart to leave you. Surely God will punish her for her indifference to your feelings."

"You must not say such things, Yvonne," cried Marie quickly; "Martha was perfectly free to choose her own life, and was by no means obliged to stifle her desires in order to stay with me, who could never have compensated her for such a sacrifice. All that I ask is, that Madame de Kerbriant should keep her word, and give my sister a position really worthy of her talents."

"Well, well," grumbled Yvonne, going back to her spinning-wheel, "Though I am only a poor old woman, I know that you are worth a hundred such as Mademoiselle Martha, and that you know a great deal more than she does, though she did make such a fuss about herself."

Marie's answer was interrupted by the entrance of the Abbé Surville.

"Well, and how is my little friend to-day? Do

not disturb yourself," he added, gently pushing Marie back to her seat. "You have been crying again! it is of no use to deceive me, your red eyes betray you. Why *will* you read your sister's letter over and over again, since it seems to you so callous or at least so cold? Come, child, be reasonable; remember that so sudden a change has turned poor Martha's head; when the first impression has worn off, her heart will turn to you again in love and confidence."

"I hope it may, but it is hardly likely," said Marie sadly; "my sister looks down upon me. When I tell her of my sad, lonely life, she finds no answer but a description of the beauty of the house she lives in, and the wealth that surrounds her; but she has no time to write a few comforting words that may soften the separation which has broken my heart."

"Listen to me, Marie," earnestly said the priest, "and forget your sister's shortcomings. What she tells you in her letter makes me tremble for her sake, and I fear some disappointment is near at hand for her. Martha will want a strong, devoted heart upon which to lean. Where is she to find this? I am an old man and know the world. Madame de Kerbriant is a frivolous woman who will get tired of your sister some day, and when her fancy is over, she will quickly forget her promises. Another thing that is likely

to blast your sister's hopes is the intimacy that seems to exist between her and the lady's-maid; nothing could be more ill advised. That woman will worm herself into your sister's confidence, and then if any coldness arises between the countess and Martha, she will take care to envenom it by taking alternately the part of the person to whom she happens to be speaking. What will become of our poor imprudent little friend; where will she look for help and protection then?"

"Here, in my arms," cried Marie, interrupting the good priest. "Thank you, Monsieur l'Abbé, you have shown me my duty. I must set to work in good earnest, in order that, should any misfortune happen to Martha, I may be able to offer her a home such as would suit her tastes, and where she could forget her troubles."

"I expected nothing less from your courageous nature, my child," said the Abbé Surville; "and every day do I pray to God to bless you and strengthen you in your resolve."

"Never fear, Monsieur le Curé," said Yvonne. "Heaven watches over Mademoiselle Marie, and I am sure will make her rich and happy some day; indeed, it will be but her right."

"I will write to Martha," said the priest; "for I must point out to her the dangers that threaten her; and if I can not convince her, at least I shall

have the consolation to know that I left no stone unturned in her favor."

"And I will add a few lines to your letter, if you will let me," added Marie. "I am not angry with my sister now; I only want to surround her with such tender care that she will not be able to help rewarding me with her whole love and confidence."

Marie's former cheerfulness seemed to return as she made this generous resolve, and she hastened to put writing materials at once within the priest's reach. That evening the following letter was duly posted.

"RENNES, November 9, 1851.

"Your sister, my dear child, showed me your letter, and I am anxious to answer the passage referring to myself. Believe me, I am your devoted friend, and my most earnest wish is to see you happy. Do not think, therefore, that it is but a spirit of contradiction which urges me to give you a little advice. You said I never understood your character; indeed, my child, I fathomed it but too well, and for that reason only did I try to turn you from the path toward which you inclined.

"You are young and lack experience; do not refuse to listen to an old man who would fain save

you from many a disappointment, to say nothing of unavailing remorse. You have undertaken a very difficult task; have you well weighed its attendant responsibilities? To be a child's governess means to become the mother of its heart and intellect, the guide which is to develop its good qualities and destroy its evil tendencies; it means a solemn promise to cultivate its mind, and to give it, together with the solid foundation of all education, the accomplishments befitting its station in life.

"Do you feel yourself competent to fill these duties? Ask your conscience this question, and ask it impartially. It must needs answer you that such is not the case. You never strove seriously to acquire the knowledge which your present position renders indispensable: how then can you impart this knowledge to Irene?

"I know that you will think me hard upon you, but I only speak such words that I may save you on the very brink of danger, while there is yet time. You would do better to leave Madame de Kerbriant at once, than stay to incur her displeasure at a later time; but if you persist in remaining with her, at least act with common prudence.

"You tell your sister that the lady's-maid makes a confident of you. This is a decided danger for you, my poor child, and you would do well to put a stop to such familiarity. Never treat

the servants otherwise than with the strictest good-breeding, but take care, on the other hand, never to give them a hold on your private life, and above all, never tell them your little troubles, your petty vexations. Your own words, misinterpreted and misunderstood, will be officiously reported to the countess, and become the source of far worse vexations.

"I do not wish to reproach you, Martha, but I have something serious yet to tell you. Your sister's life hung in the balance during five days, and, though she is out of danger at present, it will be long, I fear, before she recovers her former strength. Whence came this sickness, which might have been a fatal one? It was owing to your own indifference and neglect. You left her gladly; unheeding her grief, you even forgot to write for a very long time.

"Then she wrote to you, and her letter was full of tender solicitude. You took a fortnight to answer it, and then found nothing to speak of but the wealth and splendor in the midst of which you are now living. Not a kind word to comfort her in her loneliness and sadness, only a brief formal assurance that you love her.

"Your conduct is very heartless, Martha, not to say ungrateful; for you surely can not have forgotten Marie's kindness to you. I like to think that you will hasten to make up for the cruel im-

pression which your silence has left on your sister.

"I earnestly trust that your way of life may be an easy one; but, my child, do not think that riches only are requisite to make it so. Believe in Providence, and accept the position in which it has placed you. Remember that the only lasting happiness lies in the fulfillment of one's duty. I shall often pray for you, and ask of God to give you a right understanding of his holy will, that you may be preserved from the dangers amid which your lot is cast.

"Under any circumstances, however, think of me as of your sincere and attached friend,

"L. SURVILLE."

"DEAREST MARTHA: I am afraid Monsieur Surville has been scolding you on my account; pray forgive me, darling, for I have been unreasonable. I wanted you to tell me you were as grieved as I am at our separation, and for a moment, I even doubted your affection.

"But that is over, and I abjure such unkind thoughts. Send me a kiss and let us forget the past. I am truly glad that you have found such considerate kindness in your new home; you deserve it, dear. I shall feel quite happy if you will only write to me now and then, and above

all, tell me if you have any trouble to worry you.

"I shall always remain your loving and devoted sister, MARIE DELMAS.

"RENNES, November 9, 1851."

VI.

THE letters which we have just read did not meet with a very enthusiastic reception from Martha, immersed as she was in her worldly cares.

"I declare," she commented, "that one would think I was utterly incapable of managing my own affairs! I ought, forsooth, to keep a journal of all I do and think, and send it to the Abbé Surville, that he may judge whether it comes up to his antiquated notions! I shall take good care to do nothing of the kind; for I should expose myself to a storm of moral treatises. And concerning Marie, too, what tragical reproaches! My neglect the cause of her illness! Stuff and nonsense! do I not love her as one loves a sister, and often think of her, and yet I feel in perfect health. Besides, my occupations are so numerous that I have not time to write often. Monsieur Surville and my sister vie with each other in foretelling misery and disappointment for me, and offering me advice and consolation. As to advice, I can hardly want it; for they are incapa-

ble of appreciating the place I have won for myself; while as for consolation, well, I will keep that in reserve; it may become wonderfully useful some day, I dare say," thought poor Martha, with a harsh laugh.

Just then Irene came into the room.

"Are we going to study to-day, mademoiselle? I wish mamma would not make you go out with her so much, so that I might begin work again. I want to become a regular blue-stocking. I really am ashamed of myself when I see so many of my little friends so much more forward in their education. I must set to work, so that my father may be proud of his Irene."

"You are quite right," dryly answered Martha; "but if your mother wishes me to go out with her, I can not refuse to do so."

"I'll go and ask her to let you stay at home. I am sure she will not vex me by refusing."

The child ran away without waiting for an answer.

"What a little madcap!" cried the maid Jane, who was carrying a tray; "she almost made me upset your chocolate; where was she going in such a hurry?"

"To ask her mother to let me stay at home, and begin her studies again."

"Madame will not do that; for her dress for Madame de l'Ortal's ball is coming this afternoon,

and she will not decide upon taking it till she hears your advice."

"I fear that dress will have to be changed. I advised the countess to have it in mauve, and she would choose green, which does not suit her complexion."

"Ah! but perhaps you do not know that madame does not choose to grow old. She fancies herself still a beautiful girl; she worries me terribly if I do not fully succeed in hiding beneath a thick layer of pearl-powder the wrinkles that are beginning to show round her eyes, or if I let one gray hair escape the dyeing-brush. It is a real torment to have to dress a coquette. Madame is thirty-six, and she insists upon looking as fresh and attractive as you, Mademoiselle Martha, who are not twenty."

"That would be difficult certainly, but madame is very good looking for her age."

"Oh! yes, well enough when she is alone, but she pales before you. Are you going to Madame de l'Ortal's ball too?"

"I do not know yet; I got the invitation, but as I have nothing but a plain white dress——"

"But you will be charming so, mademoiselle," eagerly said the maid, "and I am sure you will be admired. If you only knew what a sensation you made at that great dinner that madame gave! I was there, behind the dining-room door; John

and Lewis repeated to me every word that the guests said. I promise you, that many a noble lady was jealous of you that night."

Irene now returned and addressed her governess.

"Mamma sent me for you, mademoiselle. She did promise not to take you out again to-day, but the dress-maker and the *modiste* are both with her, and she wants your advice about her ball-dress. Go quick, please, and do come back soon; I will go and get my books and writing in order and wait for you."

"Ah! indeed!" sneered the maid, "get your books ready; but when madame is trying on a dress, she requires some time, and if mademoiselle Martha stays with her until she dismisses the *modiste* and the dress-maker, there will be very little time left for study."

"Who asked your opinion on the subject, Jane?" said the child; then turning to Martha, she resumed, "You will think of me, won't you, and hurry away as soon as you can?"

"Yes, I will promise you that," said Martha, with a look of intelligence toward the lady's-maid. She then went to the countess's dressing room.

Madame de Kerbriant sat listlessly rocking herself in a large arm-chair, examining laces and ribbons with which she did not seem very much pleased.

"Come quick," she cried as the governess entered the room. "I can not make up my mind. I really think I shall have to give up my plans altogether. Every thing seems against me. Madame de l'Ortal's ball is to be to-morrow, and I have had a most excruciating headache ever since this morning. My nerves are so shaken that I am not the same person. This dress which I thought charming yesterday seems in bad taste to-day; do you not find it so? It makes me look like a ghost," she added, as she bent over a rich green silk brocade.

"I had taken the liberty to propose mauve, madame; it is such a fine contrast with a brunette complexion."

"So," cried the countess impatiently, "you think that my dark skin only admits of neutral colors?"

"No, madame, but I think we must needs give in to certain fashionable *dicta*, which forbid a young married woman of twenty-five from dressing exactly the same as a girl of fifteen."

"What do you mean?" cried the countess, "I hope I do not look like a grandmother yet!"

"Certainly not, madame; but will you not try on this lovely dress? I am sure it will suit you to a nicety."

With the help of Martha and the dress-maker Madame de Kerbriant slipped on the rich toilette

and placed herself before one of the Venetian mirrors.

"Oh! it is really charming!" she said, "if only I could have a little more color for to-morrow night!"

She gazed coquettishly into the glass. "But it seems to me that this new style makes the figure clumsy; what do you think, Martha?"

"Well, I hardly think it does, madame; your figure always look slight."

"By the by," said the countess still addressing Martha, "what dress do you mean to wear to-morrow?"

"I have not much choice. If I am to have the honor of accompanying you, I must wear my white dress with blue ribbons."

"Just so; that will be both pretty and simple, a very suitable *toilette* for a governess."

Martha bit her lips with vexation, and casting a look at herself in the mirror, thought that the beauty of the governess in plain white muslin would surely outdo that of the wealthy and superbly dressed countess. She did not fail to promise herself the gratification of making the most of the contrast.

The dress-maker and the *modiste* had now and then hazarded a timid word of advice; but Madame de Kerbriant, absorbed in her favorite's talk, hardly condescended to notice them. As

for Martha herself, she affected a little scornful air of superiority, and took no heed of them when they appealed directly to her.

A knock was suddenly heard at the door. "Who is that coming to disturb us?" impatiently said the countess. "Go and see, Martha."

Martha went and returned.

"It is the count who wishes me to go to Mademoiselle Irene. Have I your leave to go, madame?"

"No, indeed! Irene can wait; one day more or less will make no difference to her. You must see about my lace; no one but you knows how to place it so artistically."

Monsieur de Kerbriant, tired of waiting outside, made his way into the room.

"I hope, my dear," he began with a good-natured laugh, "that you will at last condescend to grant my request. Poor Irene sadly wants her governess, and I must tell you that I am anxious myself that she should resume her studies."

"I can not possibly do without Martha this morning," answered his wife; "have you forgotten Madame de l'Ortal's ball to-morrow night?"

"But surely you do not want a whole morning, to try on a new dress?"

"What do you know about that?"

"At any rate, my dear, can not you ask the

advice of Madame Dumont and Mademoiselle Berthé?"

"And do you suppose that it is either Madame Dumont or Mademoiselle Berthé that can suggest the charming combinations which of late have attracted such flattering notice, even from yourself?"

"Come, Laura dear, be reasonable; I wish Irene to work hard. You have time enough at odd moments to consult Mademoiselle Martha."

"This is intolerable!" said the countess. "You are quite a tyrant, monsieur! you see that I am scarcely dressed, and that I can not do without Martha."

"I assure you, Laura," said the count, with a twinkle in his eye, "that a ribbon more or less can not add to your charms. You look uncommonly well as you are, and I think can not improve upon yourself."

"Indeed!" said the countess, somewhat mollified, "is this your opinion too, Martha?

"Yes, madame, it is; and I shall now ask leave to retire."

"I am forced to give you up; but remember, if any thing goes wrong, I shall send for you again."

The count bowed to Martha as they left the room together.

Since there is nothing deeply interesting in

the conversation of the countess and her tradeswomen, we will pass it over and listen instead to that of the count with his daughter's governess.

VII.

"If you have no objection, I should like to be present at Irene's lessons," said the count, as he followed Martha to her own apartment. "I am most impatient to see my daughter resume the course of her preliminary studies. She is now eleven, and it is time to rouse her mind. Her temper is gentle and docile, she has no frivolous tastes, and I should therefore be most happy, mademoiselle, to see you apply all your energies to the development of her good qualities and the guidance of those intellectual leanings which I discover in her."

"Believe me, monsieur, I will not neglect to do so. She is very serious for her age, and only too eager to work."

"It is just for this very reason, mademoiselle, that I would beg of you, partly from compliance with my wishes, partly in the interests of your pupil, to avoid as much as possible my wife's importunities to accompany her in her shopping excursions. Such visits are a great loss of time for Irene, and the child has been too long ne-

glected. Let us both try to remedy her backwardness, which would be worse than it is, were not my child gifted—I say it, putting aside all undue partiality—with more than a common mind."

They had reached the school-room, and Irene rushed forward, throwing herself on her father's neck.

"How kind of you, papa! You kept your word. Oh! thank you!"

Then turning to her governess, she said, "I must kiss you, too, mademoiselle. I was so sorry when I thought you would not come back."

Martha coldly kissed the child's forehead, and sat down to begin her instructions. The lesson was a long one, and Monsieur de Kerbriant took care to listen in perfect silence, with his whole mind bent on the subject before him. When it was over, he put a few questions to the governess, regarding her method of teaching. As Martha's knowledge was not extensive, she did not impress the count very favorably in her answers to his examination.

He was a just and sensible man, and was not disposed to judge her by this first impression. She might be shy; but he would wait, and meanwhile watch her narrowly, he thought; since his wife, on whom this task should naturally have devolved, cared only for Martha as a supplementary lady's-maid.

"Irene, dear," he said to his daughter, "I shall come and assist at your lessons every day; it will be a great pleasure to me to follow my dear child's progress." Then turning to Martha, he said courteously, "Do not fear, mademoiselle, that I shall interfere with your method in the slightest degree. I wish to be a mere looker-on."

Martha bowed slightly, then turned away to conceal her vexation—a vain task, however; and Irene, clinging to her father's arm, as she capered away and smiled a farewell to her governess, said coaxingly,

"If you are pleased with me, papa, come and tell me all about some of your beautiful old pictures; you are so proud of them, you know."

"What an odious supervision!" cried Martha, as soon as she found herself alone. "Shall I submit to such interrogations at any time he chooses? Impossible! I would rather undergo all Madame de Kerbriant's impertinence, and more. Ah!" she went on, speaking to herself, "it is thus I am to be treated; with disdain by the countess, with condescension or mistrust by the count. Very well; but I am not going to submit to this tamely. 'A white dress is a very suitable toilette for a governess,' says my lady. But I shall take care that the governess shall appear so handsome that the countess will sicken

with envy to see it. I know how to make the most of what little I have. I can prove that riches alone do not confer beauty or distinction, and that the most superb toilette only serves to show off the physical defects of the wearer."

"You are right, mademoiselle," said Jane insinuatingly, having crept on tiptoe within hearing of the imprudent girl. "Madame's pretensions are truly laughable."

Martha turned sharply round, rather ashamed of having been overheard.

"So you were there, Jane?" she asked.

"Yes, mademoiselle, I came to offer you my services, if you have any little preparations to make for to-morrow. Madame has just gone to bed, saying she has a bad headache. I know better; she wants to regain her good looks, and this is but a pretext. This morning, she thought her complexion looked rather sallow, and she fancies that two days' perfect rest will restore a bloom that is, in truth, gone forever. My time is my own, therefore; so I came to see if you wanted me."

"Thank you. I shall be very glad of your help. Let us set to work; we shall be more comfortable in my bedroom."

It was not long before Martha, whose taste was singularly good, had with Jane's help arranged a very pretty costume; but she found it

impossible in the mean while not to gossip about her personal grievances. The lady's-maid, seeing her opportunity, made the most of it, encouraged Martha's confidences, by herself narrating cleverly-chosen bits of gossip about her mistress, and conveyed the impression that she was devoted, heart and soul, to the interests of the young teacher.

The truth of the matter was that Jane, who had at first possessed her mistress's whole confidence, had found herself ousted from her post of favorite, since Martha's arrival in the family mansion, and was now determined to take the first opportunity of regaining her former influence. She saw to what excellent use the girl's imprudent words might be put, and, to gain her end, had neglected no sign of affectionate importunity toward the governess, whom she treated for a while with the same consideration as if she had been the Countess de Kerbriant.

Deluded by appearances, and dazzled by the friendship which the countess professed toward her, Martha had greeted Jane's advances in good faith, sometimes kindly, sometimes rather superciliously, as a homage due to her. Thus she had even envenomed the hatred which the treacherous maid bore her, and the latter only waited in vindictive impatience for a propitious moment in which to betray her.

VIII.

MARTHA spent the following day in feverish expectation. She thought the evening would never come.

When Monsieur de Kerbriant, according to his promise, assisted once more at his daughter's lessons, he had reason to be still less satisfied than the previous day with the young governess's way of discharging her duties. He seriously asked himself whether he ought in conscience to leave his child in such incompetent hands; but, unwilling to come to a hasty or ill-considered decision, he again resolved to watch Martha more narrowly than ever. So the poor girl, without knowing it, was under the rigorous *surveillance* of two persons, whose interest in her arose from very different motives. The count, in his anxiety for his child, longed to assure himself of Mademoiselle Delmas's fitness to counteract, by her good example, the fatal influence which he feared the countess's frivolity might have, sooner or later, on Irene's impressionable nature. If she had escaped it hitherto, it was, he thought, only

through the natural purity of her character. Jane, on the other hand, was treasuring up in her memory every little inadvertence of which, in time, she could make use to ruin the person whom she chose to consider as her supplanter in Madame de Kerbriant's good graces.

At seven o'clock the countess called Martha, rang for her maid, and began to dress. This operation was both slow and long, for two days' rest had unluckily failed to restore the bloom of youth to her cheek; and she insisted upon visiting this lack of success on her unfortunate servants, whom she accused of taking no pains to make her look well, despite her laces and diamonds.

After three hours of miserable dawdling, of pinning and unpinning, and shifting ribbons and bows, Martha was left free to think of her own dress.

"Don't be long, mind," said the countess. "I hate waiting."

Mademoiselle Delmas rather flew than ran to her room. "At last," she thought, "we shall see who will lord it to-night." She soon improvised a lovely fancy head-dress, and hastily put on her plain white dress; then, casting a glance of admiration at herself as she passed her mirror, she returned to her patroness.

The maid, notwithstanding her jealousy, could

not repress a cry of genuine admiration. Martha was, in truth, charmingly lovely.

Her magnificent fair hair, with blue ribbon plaited into it, was rolled, diadem-fashion, round her small head; her large black eyes, lit up by the expectation of making a "hit," were absolutely radiant; her cheeks wore the most becoming and vivid carnation; while her graceful figure seemed more willowy than ever to-night. Her muslin skirt was trimmed with tulle and blue ribbons, like those in her hair; and her little white shoes had blue rosettes to match.

It would have been impossible to surpass such a charming *ensemble;* and for a moment Madame de Kerbriant's vexation almost made her think of staying at home, rather than invite public attention to such a contrast as existed between her and Martha. Her vanity, however, got the better of her, and whispered that no one would dream of noticing a governess: this it was that decided her, and she started for the ball.

Martha took her place in the carriage with the count and countess. The latter took care to expatiate on the modesty with which she ought to behave at the ball, and on the propriety of keeping herself in the background, and not seeking to attract the attention of the great people she would meet. This followed from her position, said Madame de Kerbriant, who had hardly

finished her lecture when the carriage drew up at Madame de l'Ortal's door.

Martha's entrance into the drawing-room was a true ovation. There were many lovely and charming girls among the guests, but Martha Delmas outshone them all. Her beauty had never suffered from the fatiguing round of worldly pleasures, and her manner as well as her complexion was freshness itself. She had grown up in the healthy atmosphere of the life which Marie had secured to her. Another great charm was the contrast between her jet-black eyes and her fair hair; while, to crown all, the very simplicity and exquisite taste of her toilette, and her finished and courtly manners, gave her an indescribable superiority over every one present.

Madame de Kerbriant had rather liked the idea of introducing her *protegée* into society; but she had not reckoned upon bringing in a rival to carry off the homage to which she was accustomed, and to share with her the circle of admirers with which she loved to surround herself. She had once been handsome, and would have it that she was so still, in spite of the lapse of time. Her feelings can be easily imagined when she perceived Martha, amid a knot of importunate admirers, enter with perfect self-possession into the dance; and, by her wit, her beauty, and her charm, draw all eyes to herself. The young girl,

meanwhile, absorbed in this novel pleasure, failed to notice the look of rage that settled on the countess's face; or, if she noticed it, it only enhanced her delight.

Madame de Kerbriant had many enemies among her own sex; women who, less favored than herself with regard either to beauty or to wealth, had often had to put up with her exaggerated pretensions or her ill-natured remarks. These ladies were quick to read her embittered heart; and, in order to render her discomfiture complete, hastened to enter into conversation with her.

"Are you ill to-night, dear countess? or what makes you so pale?" asked a dark, skinny little woman dressed in a conspicuous rose-colored costume; "or is it this green brocade that produces this effect? I only hint at this through my sincere friendship for you. You really should avoid such glaring colors."

"One should learn a little moderation at your age," croaked an old lady nearly sixty, with a long, sharp nose.

"I think, countess, that the cut of your *corsage* is rather too juvenile."

"Without reckoning the fact that your bare shoulders show that you have grown terribly thin of late," echoed another old hag, whose bones seemed coming through her skin.

"Do tell us where you picked up that charming young girl you brought here with you," said the first speaker. "What a delightful countenance and dazzling expression! She can wear any thing; no dress, however extravagant or in bad taste, can take any thing from her beauty."

"And she can defy all fashions," said the woman with the sharp nose, "or adopt them at will, even those least calculated to show off the figure to advantage. I never saw any thing like her manner and her distinguished bearing."

"And without being too fat," said the thin lady, "her *embonpoint* is just what is needed to make her figure perfect."

Madame de Kerbriant, tortured by these ill-natured remarks, was half-choked with rage. The conspirators coolly watched the result of their shafts, and secretly triumphed in their success.

"It is very kind of you, ladies," at length said the wretched woman, "to take so much interest in a poor young governess whom I rescued from the poverty in which she was plunged."

"Oh! every one knows how kind-hearted you are," said a fourth lady, well-known for her sarcastic wit.

This was too much for Madame de Kerbriant, and, vexed beyond measure, she rose to go across to Madame de l'Ortal, who was one of her most

intimate friends, and to whom she now confided her intention of leaving at once.

"What, so soon?" cried the baroness.

"I don't feel very well," answered the countess; "will you kindly send for my husband?"

"He has just sat down to a game of whist; he will be vexed," commented the baroness, as she gave the required order.

"I can not help it; I am too ill," said Madame de Kerbriant, darting a malignant look at Martha, who was just passing by her in the mazes of the dance. Madame de l'Ortal followed her friend's glance.

"Be candid for once, Laura," she said; "it is this young girl's success, is it not, that is the cause of your sudden indisposition?"

"You are my oldest friend, Blanche, and I will conceal nothing from you. I *do* think the little artful thing has shamefully abused my kindness. She turns my very condescension into a source of humiliation to myself; but it shall not go on, she shall see that a poor and nameless governess can not, with impunity, aspire beyond her position."

Monsieur de Kerbriant had obeyed his wife's summons.

"Are you really very unwell, Laura?" he asked.

"How can you ask me such a question? I

want to go at once. Please look for Martha and tell her we are going home."

The dance was just over; the count went up to Mademoiselle Delmas and gave her his wife's message. She could not help exclaiming,

"What! already?" But there was no help for it, and, crossing the room on Monsieur de Kerbriant's arm, she went out amid the admiring looks of the young men, and the smiles of the girls with whom she had made friends. Madame de Kerbriant had already preceded them downstairs; she never once spoke to the governess during the homeward drive, but stopped for a moment at the door of her own room, to say in a cold and snappish tone,

"I shall have something to say to you to-morrow, mademoiselle."

With these words she slammed the door to and disappeared, while Martha quietly regained her room. She was a little surprised at the countess's violence, but, sitting down before the large mirror in her drawing-room, she reviewed the events of the evening, and came to a very natural conclusion.

"Madame de Kerbriant is evidently jealous of me," she thought; "she had not anticipated that I should eclipse her in society. Well, I was admired to-night, and it is delightful to hear one's beauty praised!"

These meditations long occupied the girl's mind, and the result which might possibly follow to-morrow's threatened explanation seemed to fade entirely from her memory.

IX.

MADEMOISELLE DELMAS only saw the count and Irene next day. The countess was ill and her maid could not leave her. Monsieur de Kerbriant's demeanor was as courteous and serious as usual, and not a word was spoken relative to last night's entertainment. When he left the school-room, Martha tried to get some information from Irene, but the child had not seen her mother, and the governess was forced to wait for the news she was now so anxious to get. Several days went by in the same fashion: Madame de Kerbriant never left her room, or at least Mademoiselle Delmas was refused access to it. Her loneliness made her turn momentarily to thoughts of her sister, and the result was the following letter, which we copy in full.

"PARIS, December 5, 1851.

"I fear, dear Marie, that you still think me very negligent. I assure you you are wrong. I have so much to do that I find scarcely any time at my own disposal. To-day I have a little

breathing-time, which I devote to you, and since you wish it, I will tell you both my little troubles and my pleasures, though you will easily perceive that the latter more than counterbalance the former.

"Monsieur de Kerbriant is still as kind as ever, but he worries me sometimes, as he thinks very highly of his daughter's talents, and wants me therefore to develop in her imaginary qualities, which in reality I find non-existent. He has got into the habit of being present during lessons and of examining my method almost every day. This is very annoying, for I fancy Irene sees through her father's distrust of me; she often questions me boldly herself. If I do not answer at once, I see the count frown and get fidgety. Of course, I take no notice, but I am on the look-out to find some means of putting a stop to this annoyance.

"Such are my troubles. Now let us speak of my pleasures. I went to a ball last week, at the Baroness de l'Ortal's house. If Madame de Kerbriant could have foreseen the success I was destined to have, I am sure she would have made me decline the invitation,

"My dress was lovely, white trimmed with tulle and blue ribbons. I can say with truth that few girls of my age could come up to me that night, and I was soon assailed by crowds of ad-

mirers. Among my most assiduous partners, I noticed one young man of very distinguished appearance who was perpetually hovering round me. He asked me during a quadrille which we danced together, what was my position in Madame de Kerbriant's house. When I told him that I was only a governess, he said courteously, 'I am afraid you must find such a life a very dependent one, mademoiselle, especially with a woman of the countess's temper. You deserve a better fate.'

"'When fortune is wanting,' I answered, 'one can not expect much consideration, and still less an independent position.'

"But,' he said gallantly, 'have you not those perfections that stand in lieu of fortune!'

"I said nothing, and as the dance was over, the young man took me back to my seat. I was dancing again with him when Monsieur de Kerbriant came to fetch me; we had hardly been at the ball two hours, but this is what had happened.

"The countess, in her vexation at my success, had made believe to be ill, and ordered her carriage. I was forced to go, but the disappointment was almost made up for by the look of regret that overspread my partner's countenance.

"How charming he seemed, Marie! I can not help thinking of him; my fancy pictures him as present. I do not even know his name, but I re-

gret him. If only Jane, the lady's-maid, who not long ago was in Madame de l'Ortal's service, and must know all the baroness's guests by sight, could tell me; but she is pinned to the countess's sick-bed, and I am left to my fancy, to invent a name for him!

"I think I saw him go up to Madame de l'Ortal, the very moment I left the room. He spoke to her excitedly, and looked over in my direction. I hardly dare dwell on such thoughts, and yet every thing seems to point to them. I even fancied that I heard his voice yesterday, as I crossed the passage leading by Monsieur de Kerbriant's study. I listened involuntarily, and thought I caught my own name. But why should this be true! No doubt this man is rich, and would not dream of me, though his form haunts my fancy.

"I meant to write you a long letter, dear sister, and now I find I have forgotten all I wanted to say. Remember me kindly to Monsieur Surville. I do not write to him because his letter grieved me; he overwhelms me with reproaches which I do not feel as if I deserved, and I could not answer him in a right spirit.

"I will not scold you, dear Marie, for your suspicions of me, and I kiss you with all my heart. Your affectionate sister,

"MARTHA DELMAS."

The letter was scarcely finished when Jane came in, saying,

"Madame wishes to see you at once, mademoiselle."

"What is the matter?"

"I hardly know. Madame de l'Ortal is there; she has been closeted for an hour with the count and countess. I am sure they were talking about you."

"Did the countess still look angry with me, Jane?"

"I will come this evening, mademoiselle, and tell you all I know; but do not keep the baroness waiting now."

Martha went down with a beating heart to the boudoir; but if possible, her agitation only enhanced her beauty.

X.

LET us go back to Marie, and imagine ourselves at the end of January, 1852. If we had taken a walk about that time through the Rue d'Estrée, in the town of Rennes, we should have come upon a pretty little shop with green shutters, bearing a device, as is the custom in France, which ran, "Honesty is the best policy." This was Madame Dalbau's shop, the dress-maker who had formerly engaged Marie as seamstress.

Madame Dalbau had not been slow to find out the young girl's good qualities, and had derived great benefit from her willing help, as Marie had perfect taste and worked like a fairy. She never lost a moment's time; one would have thought that the work slid through her fingers, so deftly and quickly was it finished.

The dress-maker had long been a widow, and had an only son, who, at the time we speak of, was about twenty-three years of age. Lucien had from his boyhood understood the necessity of hard work, and had therefore chosen the trade of a cabinet-maker. Though not a very lucrative

occupation in his native town, it had enabled him to support himself, especially as his tastes were simple to frugality, and as he carefully shunned all dissipation and social excitements. A true artist, he had sent various specimens of his own carving to several exhibitions, and had carried off prizes and medals, so that he had fair ground to hope for ultimate success in his business.

His mother, having long ago ceased to support Lucien, had saved a considerable sum, and put it out to interest; her numerous customers had always been among the most wealthy and distinguished people of Rennes, and the good woman had serious thoughts of retiring from business in order to enjoy the fruits of her thriftiness, when Marie came to solicit an engagement. After two years, Madame Dalbau, seeing all the young girl's good, reliable qualities, did not fear to propose a partnership. Although Marie's aptitude had reconciled her to her trade again, she yet thought the time must soon come when she really would feel obliged to give up the responsibility, and she knew no one so suited to the place of her successor as her work-woman Marie Delmas. A partnership was therefore temporarily concluded. The Abbé Surville whose advice was dutifully asked, strongly urged Marie to accept such an unhoped-for offer, and by the middle

of November, 1851, Madame Dalbau left her work-shop to open a regular emporium of fashion. The partners now occupied the same house. Marie, however, did not leave her little garret without a pang.

There she had lived with her sister, and still fancied that Martha's spirit haunted the room; there too she had known old Yvonne, who had been so kind and motherly to her, and with whom in her prosperity she would not part. Madame Dalbau, delighted with Marie's gratitude toward the poor woman, offered her a room in her house. All things having thus been satisfactorily arranged, Mademoiselle Delmas gave herself up to the care of the new shop. She saw in its success a means of comfortable living for herself and a possible haven for Martha, should she come to need it.

Madame Dalbau's custom grew even more extended under the young partner's management, and the shop with the device, "Honesty is the best policy," became the most fashionable in Rennes. We have said that January was drawing to an end. The weather was cold and foggy; the stove in the work-room was singing with a pleasant noise, suggestive of warmth and comfort. The sewing-girls were all at work, and Marie, brandishing a huge pair of scissors, was just about to cut out a velvet mantle. She was

still the same lovable young girl we have seen before, and her new responsibility seemed to have shed more earnestness over her countenance, without taking from it any of its old kindness.

"Will you pass the thread, please, Miss Rosa?" said a pretty little apprentice of twelve years old.

"Look for it yourself, my dear; I am in a hurry."

"Oh! I see it. Here it is right in front of me."

"You are so careless!"

"And you are so disobliging; always afraid of being inconvenienced."

"What do you mean, miss? you are getting impudent."

"Miss Rosa fancies," said another girl, "that no one should speak to her but with the greatest respect."

"Yes, indeed," said the mischievous little girl who had spoken first, "as if she were Madame Dalbau or Mademoiselle Marie."

"Do you know, Martha," said a girl of the name of Constance, "that Mademoiselle Marie would scold you if she heard you?"

"Oh! no, indeed, Mademoiselle Marie is too fond of me for that. I am very cold," added the child, laughing; "Miss Rosa, give me your place by the stove, and please let me warm myself a little."

"Oh! I dare say," dryly answered Rosa;

"the stove warms the whole room sufficiently. Stay where you are; I am not going to move for your convenience."

"O dear! O dear! I am so cold!" willfully cried Martha, as she began to sob.

This little altercation had been carried on tolerably loud; but Marie, absorbed in her own thoughts, had taken no notice. The real (or feigned) sobs that shook the little girl's frame roused her, and running to her, she took the child in her arms.

"What is the matter? Who has been vexing you, dear?" she asked.

"It is Rosa, who will not let me go near the stove."

"Do not believe her, mademoiselle," said the work-woman; "she presumes on your partiality for her, and wants to tyrannize over us all, on the strength of it."

Marie did not answer, but drawing up two chairs, sat down upon one, and, putting Martha on the other, began mildly to lecture her. Madame Dalbau happened to come in just then, in quest of a cloak.

"Is Madame Selbert's mantle cut out?" she asked.

"Yes," said Marie, "get it ready, Constance."

"Ah!" smiled the elder woman, "you are petting your little Martha."

"Petting her and scolding her at the same time; she is getting naughty."

"O fie! that would be very wrong. Martha, child, you would not grieve Mademoiselle Marie?"

"No, indeed, madame," said the little girl, "I will not be so willful again. I mean to work with all my might to please you and mademoiselle, for I love you both."

Madame Dalbau and Marie kissed the engaging child, and after a few kind words to the sewing-girls, and an especial recommendation to Rosa to be gentle and obliging, they went down together into the shop.

XI.

"I AM afraid," said Madame Dalbau, "that you spoil your *protégée* a little."

"I can not help it, madame; I love that child so, that I lose all firmness with her. She reminds me of my sister, whose name she bears; and when I see her with her long fair curls, I almost cheat myself into the belief that it is my Martha herself who stands before me."

"But suppose she should get lazy through your indulgent petting, and even not repay your affection?"

"Oh! do not try to dispel my illusions concerning her," said Marie, with tears in her eyes. "I should like that child to owe every thing to me, and to give me a place in her heart in return for my care of her."

"I hope she will, Marie; you deserve it. Is it not a long time since you heard from your sister?"

"A little over a month. Her last letter was dated the 28th of December. Very likely her next may announce her approaching marriage.

She tells me that she has met the young man who was so fascinated by her at her first ball, many times since."

"I do not remember that letter; your sister writes so seldom. Will you show it to me?"

"Here it is," said Marie, drawing the beloved missive from her pocket-book, and Madame Dalbau read it in a loud whisper. It ran thus:

"PARIS, December 28, 1851.

"MY DEAR MARIE: I have much to tell you—things which make me very happy; and though I know nothing for certain, I have every reason to believe that my hopes are well founded. You remember I told you in my last letter that I fancied I had caught my own name pronounced in Monsieur de Kerbriant's study. I was not mistaken. The count was closeted with the Baroness de l'Ortal's godson, Monsieur Albéric Belmont, the same whom I met at the ball.

"I must tell you all from the beginning, so that you may understand.

"You know how disgusted Madame de Kerbriant was at my success at Madame de l'Ortal's house. I did not see her for several days after that, and it was just as I was finishing my last letter that Jane came to call me to the countess's boudoir, at her request and Madame de l'Ortal's. The

former received me very curtly, hardly deigning to notice my inquiries after her health. Monsieur de Kerbriant was gravely courteous, as is his wont, and the baroness was affectionate and welcoming.

"We talked for a long time: then she asked me to play and sing. My performance delighted her, and in truth I had never played so well. What more shall I say?

"She came back several times with her godson, Monsieur Belmont, who always appeared my devoted slave; and I was asked in return to accompany the count and countess to four or five informal parties at Madame de l'Ortal's house. She evidently likes me very much.

"If I were not so certain that Monsieur Belmont means to sue for my hand in marriage, I should be very miserable; for Madame de Kerbriant treats me with supreme contempt, and can not understand how a poor governess can occupy the time and thoughts of these high-born, wealthy people. I bear this very quietly, for I hope not to be subject to her scorn much longer. Three days more, and the old year will be out. I must wish you a happy New-Year, dear Marie, and may it bring you happiness and contentment.

"I dare not write to the Abbé Surville. I have delayed too long since his last. Give him my

kind regards and the compliments of the season.

"Your affectionate sister,

"MARTHA DELMAS."

"Did you answer her?" asked Madame Dalbau, when she had finished reading Martha's long letter.

"Only by a few words," said Marie. "My quiet life could not interest my sister much. Still I did not like to let New-Year's Day go by without sending her a message of love." And having searched her pocket-book, Marie added,

"Here is a copy of my letter to her."

"RENNES, December 31, 1851.

"DEAREST MARTHA: The new year begins to-morrow. May every wish of my heart be gratified in your favor, and you will be happy.

"A fortunate change has occurred in my life. If I had not been so busy I should have mentioned it before this. Madame Dalbau was kind enough to think that, notwithstanding my youth and want of experience, I might be of some use to her as her partner, and since November I have occupied this position in the shop she has opened on the Rue d'Estrée. We have been at work only two months, and yet the profits are already perceptible. I hope this will go on, and certainly it

will not be either my good-will or my courage that will fail me in the attempt.

"The sewing-girls' department falls especially to my share. I have a little favorite among the younger apprentices; she is twelve years old, and her name is Martha. Her features bear a certain likeness to those of my beloved sister, and the resemblance is heightened by her splendid fair curls. Since I can not be with you, this child cheats me out of the grief our separation will always cause me.

"Darling Martha, I can not say what I suffer when I think of you. Do tell me that you still love me; and though we are so far apart, send me a kiss as loving as that which I send to you.

"Your loving sister,

"MARIE."

XII.

ABOUT the end of January, the Abbé Surville received the following letter from the Count de Kerbriant, and immediately submitted it to Marie:

"PARIS, January 27, 1852.

"REVEREND SIR: I have learnt that you have always been a devoted friend to the two young Delmas girls, and that the fate of the eldest sister has been a special cause of anxiety to you, this young lady having evinced tastes very much beyond her original station in life.

"An opportunity, that will probably not occur a second time, has presented itself to dispose of Mademoiselle Martha in a perfectly suitable manner. Her rare beauty has fascinated a young man who is the godson of Madame de l'Ortal, one of our oldest friends.

"Monsieur Belmont is quite unexceptionable as a suitor. I have carefully inquired into his character, and every thing tells in his favor. His fortune amounts to about four hundred thousand francs, a quarter of which he proposes to settle on his future wife.

"Mademoiselle Delmas has begged for a short delay, that she may consider the proposal; but she is certain to accept it. I wished, meanwhile, to tell you of it and ask your advice.

"I think Mademoiselle Martha will most likely benefit by the change. She is eminently unfitted for the post of governess. I shall be very glad to be spared the painful task of telling her the truth; but in case this marriage had not relieved my perplexity, I should have been in duty bound to watch over my daughter's interests, which would have been injured by any continuance of the neglect with which Mademoiselle Delmas treats Irene's studies.

"I say again that I believe this marriage with Monsieur Belmont will, by giving her the luxury she desires, modify and ennoble her nature; and if her husband possesses any strength of character, he will know how to restrain her caprices, and to show her the serious side of life. I hope that under these circumstances Mademoiselle Martha will be happy.

"I remain, reverend sir,

"Yours sincerely,

"ALBERT DE KERBRIANT."

The priest answered this letter by begging the count to use his own judgment regarding Martha, and to do his best to secure her happiness in

this proposed marriage. He wished to admonish the young girl of the duties of her new state; but Martha hardly glanced at her reverend friend's letter: she had other things to attend to, indeed. For instance, the *trousseau* chosen by the Baroness de l'Ortal—for Martha cared for nothing except her husband's wealth, his finished manner and high-bred appearance. Monsieur Belmont, so amiable, so gallant, could not fail to make a good husband!

She remembered her sister—not that she might ask her to come and stay with her now that she herself was rich, but that she might have the pleasure of dazzling her with a description of her *trousseau* and the splendor of her wedding ceremony.

One thing only she forgot, namely, to ask her sister to be present. Marie, the poor girl, would be quite out of her accustomed sphere among the many great ladies who would press round the beautiful bride! So Martha contented herself with writing the following short note:

"PARIS, February 10, 1852.

"I was not mistaken, dear Marie; I am really going to be married. Madame de l'Ortal herself asked Madame de Kerbriant for her permission to offer me the hand of Monsieur Belmont. I accepted the proposal after a day or two to think

it over. What was there to object to? Nothing, indeed.

"Monsieur Belmont is the son of an old steward of Madame de l'Ortal's father. She is his godmother, and loves him as much as if he were her own son. He has a fortune of four hundred thousand francs, and he has settled a hundred thousand on me. We signed the settlement yesterday. The countess actually unbent a little, and even condescended to give a small party.

"Monsieur Belmont sent me a magnificent *trousseau*;* nothing was wanting — cashmere shawls, laces, and jewelry, and a lovely porte-monnaie full of pin-money.

"The wedding is to take place at the Church of St. Thomas Aquinas, on the 15th inst. At last I take leave of the annoyances of a dependent life and the fear of underhand dealings; for I found out that Jane, whom I fancied devoted to me, was secretly imbittering the countess's mind against me.

"From henceforth I shall be free, rich, and beloved: as I said once before, God has truly given me the better part. You ask me for a really affectionate kiss: I send you a thousand.

"Your loving sister,

"MARTHA."

* In France, it is the bridegroom who provides the *trousseau*.

Marie felt faint as she read this letter; her sobs stifled her, and she threw herself despairingly into Madame Dalbau's arms. A violent fever soon followed, and she was not herself for several days; but when full consciousness returned, and she looked into the kind faces of Mother Yvonne, Madame Dalbau, and the Abbé Surville, who had come too, she cried out, stretching her hands toward her friends,

"Ah! give me your love now; I need it sorely, for I no longer have a sister!"

It was the very day fixed for Martha's wedding. Madame Belmont was taking triumphant possession of the pretty little house which her husband had carefully furnished according to her taste, and whose drawing-rooms were soon filled with distinguished guests.

"Here, then," she thought, looking complacently on her new possessions, "is the fulfillment of the fatal predictions that were once dinned into my ears. At least, they have not had the power to fetter my choice or shatter my happiness."

PART SECOND.

I.

THE 15th of June, 1852, seemed to be a holiday for the sewing-girls of the shop in the Rue d'Estrée. They were all chatting gayly in the work-room, and little Martha, the petted favorite, was loud in her demonstrations of pleasure.

"Yes, I tell you," she said, "we are all to go out driving."

"Not at all," said Rosa; "we are coming back here for breakfast, after mass."

"You know nothing about it, Rosa: do you think Mademoiselle Marie would have put me aside on her wedding-day? Not only she would not part with me, but she has provided for all the girls. I know it from a sure source, for Mother Yvonne told me that the programme had been changed. We are all to go to the wedding and the mass; then, at the church door, carriages will meet us and take us out to La Prévalaye, where the breakfast will take place."

"Oh! how nice!" cried the younger apprentices. "What fun we shall have!"

"I am mad with joy only to think of it," said little Martha.

"Mademoiselle Marie is so kind," said Constance; "she is always thinking of other people's pleasure."

"Indeed, you may say she is kind," cried all the girls with one voice; "and we all love her, and hope that Monsieur Lucien Dalbau will make her very happy."

The laughing girls, absorbed in these pleasant anticipations of to-morrow's amusement, forgot their work, and busily made a thousand little plans of prospective fun.

Marie now came in, a little altered since we saw her last. Graver and older-looking, she had lost her cheerful smile, which had given place to a certain not unbecoming melancholy. Her face seemed more touching than before, and her gentle, speaking eyes won your interest at once.

"Well," she said gently, "you do not seem to be working very hard."

"We were talking of you, mademoiselle, and how could we be very industrious? Let us be idle a little, please; we were only wishing you happiness and joy."

"We are all so fond of you, Mademoiselle Marie," cried Martha as she threw herself into

her friend's arms; and coaxingly added, "Have you come to confirm Yvonne's good news? She did not make any mistake?"

"No, dear child; Yvonne was right. I wanted you to remember my wedding-day: you are often obliged to forego all enjoyment and keep closely to work; so to-morrow, after you have prayed for my happiness, we will go together to La Prévalaye. Madame Dalbau is delighted with the idea, and Monsieur Lucien has no objection to it. We shall spend a pleasant day on the Castle lawns——"

"Oh! thank you, thank you, mademoiselle ——"

"Wait a little, that is not all," said Marie. "I wish you to have a more tangible *souvenir* than that. Listen to me: you know that I was a simple working-girl like yourselves; and like many of you, I too was an orphan. Then I had a sister, who could not bear to be always obliged to work. Martha is beautiful, and her beauty won her the protection of a noble lady who took her to Paris. I remained alone, saddened and discouraged, almost envious of my sister's lot; but I soon regained control over my thoughts, and recognized my true mission. Happiness on earth consists in fulfilling the destiny which God manifestly intends to be yours. Madame Dalbau and the Abbé Surville strengthened me against

my own rebellious thoughts, and I was led to see the wisdom of their advice. My poor sister, spite of her patroness's wealth, was not happy; she would not tell me her troubles, but I guessed them all. As for me, I was at peace, and my happiness would have been complete if only Martha could have shared it. The beauty which had attracted the notice of Madame de Kerbriant, helped her to make a rich marriage. Four months ago, she became Madame Belmont, and enjoys all the luxuries that riches can procure. Still, I do not think that she is happy ; so, if you love me, you must all pray for her, for she has made a mistake in her choice in life. For my part, I have trodden the old beaten path, and now, thanks to Madame Dalbau's kindness, I have won a good position. To crown all, she now wishes me to become her own daughter. I have received comfort and encouragement in my path, and I want to comfort and encourage you. I can not bear to think that any one of you should be led into temptation. Keep to your humble but secure position, and remember that you all have a friend in me. No one that gives me real satisfaction shall ever want work ; and for the present, since it has pleased God for the last eight months to bless my endeavors, I am able to offer each of you as a wedding *souvenir*, a sum of a hundred francs in the savings-bank. Take it

as a remembrance of me; and in your prayers do not forget to name Madame Dalbau and her son, as well as me and my poor sister."

The young girls, overcome with emotion, crowded round Marie. Rosa, the eldest, constituted herself spokeswoman.

"We can never thank you enough, mademoiselle," she said; "but if our tongues are silent, you shall see from our conduct henceforward, that we are far from ungrateful, or unworthy of your benefits."

II.

THE reader will perceive that Marie was going to be married to Madame Dalbau's son. She had resolutely gone back to her work, as soon as the sorrow which her sister's letter had caused her had subsided, and Madame Dalbau was soon able to leave all the responsibility, both of the work-room and the shop, on the shoulders of her young partner. Marie was, indeed, an indefatigable worker.

Her deference and gentleness toward the elder woman soon won her the latter's admiration, as well as her sincere friendship. Before the partnership had been concluded, Lucien used to come every Sunday to pay his mother a weekly visit; but Marie's modesty and gentleness became so powerful an attraction, after she removed to his mother's house, that it was not long before he begged Madame Dalbau to speak to Mademoiselle Delmas in his favor.

The mother was delighted; but she knew Marie well, and shrewdly guessed that if her plan was to succeed, it was quite necessary to

gain the Abbé Surville's co-operation. Lucien had been an exemplary son; and his steady behavior, his simple, domestic tastes, and his eager devotedness to his work, combined to make him "a good match." Marie recognized this, and was grateful for his attentions; still it was not without much hesitation that she gave her consent. She was afraid to contract duties which might make it impossible for her to help Martha at her need, and she also wished to take charge of Yvonne's old age, as well as to direct the education and life of her little apprentice Martha, whom she so tenderly loved for her sister's sake.

The Abbé Surville imparted these intentions to Lucien, who answered that any thing which would promote Marie's happiness must be equally an object of interest to him. He begged the priest to urge upon the young girl to accept his advances; and Marie, thus pressed on all sides, yielded at last, to the great delight of her friends. It was settled that she should go on superintending the shop, while Lucien opened a cabinet-maker's establishment on his own account. Monsieur Dalbau wished the marriage to take place at once, but Marie had written to her sister, and wanted to wait for an answer, before fixing the day for the wedding.

Six weeks had already gone by, and no answer had come. Lucien impatiently begged his

betrothed to delay no longer; and poor Marie, saddened by this new proof of her sister's indifference, at last consented to fix the 16th of June as the auspicious day. How could Martha have overlooked the touching appeal which Marie had made in writing, and which ran thus?

"RENNES, April 15, 1852.

"DEAREST MARTHA: I have been waiting in vain, since your marriage, for some news of you. You forget your poor sister, in the luxury and the pleasures of your new life.

"But I never forget *you*. I am going to be married, Martha dear, and my future husband is Monsieur Lucien Dalbau, a cabinet-maker. After our marriage, he means to open a shop of his own. We are neither of us rich, yet our prospects are good. The custom of our own shop is increasing daily, and there is every reason to hope that my husband's will prosper, since every one thinks highly both of his energy and his excellent workmanship.

"Madame Dalbau, who always treated me as a daughter, is delighted that I should really become her child. One thing pleases me above all in my future husband's character: the devoted love which he bears his mother.

"Nothing would be wanting to my happiness, if you could be present at my wedding. Martha,

darling, I have no relations but you: will you not let me kiss you once more? I shall need you more than ever on that day. I love you so much that I can not hope to be quite happy if you do not come. If you would bring your husband, I should have the pleasure of knowing the man who has become my brother, and whom I already love, since he loves my sister. Will you refuse my request? No; I hope that you will come, as I ask you. I shall count the minutes till your arrival. It makes me so happy to think that I shall see you again, that I quite forget all my past grief, and fancy I have you already in my arms.

"We will try and make you forget Paris during the time that you will let us keep you. Though Madame Dalbau does not know you, she loves you for my sake, and begs me to send her affectionate regards. Monsieur Dalbau would be delighted to know both you and your husband. He hopes you will allow him to be your friend.

"Monsieur Surville will be charmed to see you again, and Mother Yvonne will be so glad to shake hands with you once more. We are all anxiously expecting you and Monsieur Belmont.

"The wedding-day shall be fixed so as not to interfere with any of your previous plans.

"My heart throbs with loving expectation

when I think of my darling Martha. Come quick to embrace your poor Marie, and assure her of your love: no joy could be greater in my estimation.

"Your affectionate sister,

"MARIE DELMAS."

We shall learn later how it was that Martha vouchsafed no answer to this loving, sisterly letter.

III.

THE morning of the 16th of June was radiant with summer beauty. Marie had shut herself in with Yvonne, and was meditating on the course of events which had insensibly led her to the solemn act of renunciation which this day would see accomplished. Lost in thought, she leaned on her little table, and seemed deaf to her faithful old friend's remonstrances.

"Mademoiselle," said the latter, "what makes you so sad, just when you are about to be as happy as I always wished you to be? Do answer me now: don't you love Monsieur Lucien, who is so kind and good, so hard-working, and so considerate toward his mother?"

"You know, Yvonne," said Marie, shaking off her melancholy, "that no one thinks more highly than I do of Monsieur Dalbau's many excellent qualities, and indeed that they alone have decided me to accept his hand."

"Then why be so sad this morning, and why cry all through the night? I heard you."

"Please do not mention it, Yvonne. How can

you ask me the reason? Have you not guessed it, or have you forgotten my sister?"

"O your everlasting sister! Has she condescended to remember you since she has become a countess or a marchioness? It is too kind of you to think of her, ungrateful thing! Let her alone, once for all, and don't think of her any more; she does not deserve it."

"You are too hard, Yvonne. You ought rather to try and appease the vexation that I can not help feeling against my sister. Martha has despised my love; and when I entreated of her to come to my marriage, she did not even answer me. Still, I must forgive her once more. No bad feeling must have a place in my heart to-day, when I am about to implore God's blessing on myself and the man whom he has given me for my husband."

"You are an angel, Mademoiselle Marie; you will be sure to be happy, never fear. Monsieur Lucien is so fond of you."

Madame Dalbau came in at this juncture; and going up to Marie, she kissed her, saying,

"Dear child, Monsieur Surville would like to see you before mass: will you see him?"

"Of course, of course, mother," said the bride; "his visit will comfort me."

The priest came in: Marie welcomed him cordially.

"It was so good of you to come," she said; "you guessed I should want your good advice to-day."

"I know, child, that you are peculiarly ingenious in inflicting self-torture on yourself; and I do hope that you will be reasonable to-day, and banish from your mind any thoughts foreign to the ceremony in which you take part this morning."

"Mother dear," said Marie, turning to Madame Dalbau, who stood anxiously by, "I have hidden nothing from you, believe me: if I am sad, it is only the thought of my sister that makes me so. I should have been so happy to see her here to-day! But in your presence all other thoughts sink into oblivion, and I think only of the joy I shall feel in really becoming your daughter."

"Dearest child, I have long called you so in my heart," said Madame Dalbau, wiping away a tear.

"I give you my blessing, Marie," resumed the priest; "for before I give it as a priest, I should like to impart it as a friend and a father. You have been brave in adversity, Marie; but you must never forget those evil days of your youth. You are now happy, and I pray this happiness may be as lasting as any earthly joy can be; but if sorrow visits you again during your future life, think of your past trials, and of the example of

your dear mother, whose worthy daughter you have shown yourself. If success is yours, do not take pride in it; be modest as before. Love him who is going to become your husband, so that, each leaning on the other's strength, you may be united till the last moment, and perform together the weary pilgrimage of life. Honor her who has been a mother to you, and who now gives you her only son. And should your sister come back to you some day, receive her with your heart, without any ill-will for the slights she has put upon you. I am sure, Marie, that you will not forget my advice, and I bless you from the bottom of my heart."

Madame Dalbau and Yvonne, who felt these words as much as Marie did, knelt down with her to receive the good priest's blessing.

"And now," he added, "think of nothing but of rejoicing blamelessly. I am going to prepare for mass. *Au revoir.*"

The three women accompanied Monsieur Surville to the door.

"It is time for you to dress, mademoiselle," said Yvonne as she came back.

"I will stay and help you, too, dear Marie," added Madame Dalbau. The young girl was soon ready. Her plain white dress became her well, and her gentle and serious countenance looked like an angel's beneath her long, floating

vail. Madame Dalbau's toilet came next, and in honor of her daughter-in-law, she was more richly dressed than she had ever been since her widowhood.

Yvonne, who came from the neighborhood of Morlaix, in Lower Brittany, put on the picturesque costume of that part of the country, which she had generally worn, this particular dress being a present from Marie. Lucien was not slow to present himself, accompanied by a few friends. His handsome face beamed with joy, and his eyes were riveted on his charming bride. The sewing-girls were not long in arriving, all dressed in white, and their features radiant with expectation. Marie greeted them all cordially.

The marriage was performed in the Church of St. Germain, the bride's parish church. The Abbé Surville stood, ready vested, at the foot of the Lady altar.

Marie felt a nervous tremor go through her as she knelt to repeat the words which were to unite her to Lucien. She soon, however, regained her composure, and banishing earthly remembrances, humbled herself before God, and begged His blessing on her marriage. Still, as she left the church, she could not repress a tear that stole down her cheek.

"What is the matter, darling?" cried Lucien

anxiously, as he got into the carriage with his wife and mother. "Are you sad?"

"Never mind, Lucien," said Marie. "I am very happy, though I could not help thinking how Martha's presence would have completed my happiness. You are not angry with me?"

"Angry! Marie, with you, who are the sweetest and best of wives! My whole life is yours now, and it shall not be my fault if your life is not happy."

"Thanks," said Marie, as she gave one hand to her husband and the other to Madame Dalbau. "I have no reason to doubt of happiness as long as it is in your hands."

The carriages stopped near the castle, and the merry groups scattered themselves through the long avenues and over the lawns. The sewing-girls, in the joy of their hearts, formed gay circles and sang as they went round and round. Marie, delighted to see them enjoying themselves, encouraged them, and sometimes mingled in their innocent revels to stimulate them the more. Lucien outdid himself, and seemed to communicate to each guest the joy that possessed his own soul.

The spot was well chosen for so gay a rendezvous. The castle of La Prévalaye, dating from the fifteenth century, is situated about five miles from Rennes. On every side are avenues of oak, fir, and lime trees, and between each avenue long

stretches of greensward. When Henry IV. of France was on his way to Nantes, he passed through Rennes, and slept at La Prévalaye. His bedroom is still shown to visitors, in memory of this great historical personage. Not far from the castle is an oak-tree planted by Henry IV. during his brief stay. One immense limb is still full of vigorous life, and the trunk, hollowed by age, is almost split in two. This tree goes by the name of Henry IV.'s oak. By following one of the broad avenues and crossing a little wood you reach the banks of the river Vilaine, which from Rennes to the coast has been turned into a canal. No more picturesque walk can be imagined than this path through lovely scenery and shady glades; and on Sunday nearly all Rennes crowds to this spot, to forget its troubles and shake off the dust of last week's business.

Marie collected all her guests in a glade where a rustic table had been spread, while little Martha ran about, pretending to be of immense use, and now and then relieved her exuberant feelings by throwing herself into the bride's arms. Madame Dalbau and Yvonne, forgetful of their old age, became as active as young girls, and the collation was soon ready. Exercise and the clear country air stimulated the appetite of all, and due honor was done to the banquet. The girls' joy was at its height, when a huge cheese,

still wrapped in a cloth and decorated with ribbons and flowers, made its appearance. This is the orthodox custom of Rennes, and these cheeses, prepared according to a Breton recipe, are highly prized as an indispensable element in a summer picnic.

Marie's sewing-girls had never assisted at such a feast before, and had never found themselves thus treated as equals: their gratitude toward their young mistress was unbounded. The day was most auspiciously spent, and the young people on their return left the bride with warm assurances that they would never forget her kindness.

Meanwhile Lucien, proud of the wife he had chosen, thanked his good mother for the help she had afforded him in his courtship. Yvonne, too, had her word to say to Marie.

"Would you let me kiss you?" she asked, "and offer you my warmest wishes? You have been so kind to me that I love you as my own child; and you know the blessings of the old bring good luck."

Marie, by way of an answer, tenderly embraced her; then kneeling with her husband before Madame Dalbau, she said in a low voice,

"Mother, bless your children."

Madame Dalbau, moved to tears, pressed the gentle bride and her husband to her motherly heart, and so ended Marie's wedding-day.

IV.

THREE months have elapsed since Marie's marriage, and happiness has been her constant portion. Lucien's shop is prospering, and his honesty is renowned through the town, while Marie's customers increase every day. Madame Dalbau, the idol of her children, spends her peaceful days in congratulating herself on the advent of her daughter-in-law, and old Yvonne still lives with the family. Her especial duty is to look after the young apprentices, and she fulfills it as willingly as she does it judiciously. Every Sunday the household receives the welcome visit of the good Abbé Surville.

How happy is our heroine! Yet sometimes the thought of Martha will intrude, and she finds no comfort but in the hope that her sister is happy too. She has long ceased to expect any news of her; but, after three months, the negligent Martha actually sent the following letter, which we will transcribe:

"PARIS, September 16, 1852.

"DEAR MARIE: I received the news of your marriage as I was starting for Switzerland.

This, I hope, will explain why I did not answer at once. I had not a moment to lose; every arrangement had been made, and the trip settled upon long ago. I could not ask Monsieur Belmont to change all his plans.

"I should have been very happy to be present at your wedding, and to have made acquaintance with Monsieur Dalbau and his mother. I don't know when I may expect this pleasure now, as my husband is very busy, and can not accompany me anywhere this year, after the long time he has already been absent from his business. But if you and your husband should come to Paris, do not forget to come and see me.

"We have been living in a small house in the Rue St. Dominique, and although it is not very gorgeous, it is a pretty and comfortable house, where I have the pleasure of receiving a great deal of the best society. I am quite 'the fashion,' on account of my good taste and my accomplishments; and the artists, who know how much I admire their talent, are very assiduous in their attentions to me. I spend my time in the cultivation of art and poetry, and this fulfillment of my old dreams makes me very happy. Monsieur Belmont has just established a banking firm, that he may be enabled to support me in still better style, and this business seems very profitable, and leaves plenty of margin for spending. I want

for nothing now; I am the absolute mistress of my own home, and the equal of the great ladies, who are only too glad to be received into my society. Such is the power of wealth, Marie.

"It is true, there are a few who are jealous of me. But is not envy the test of success? I know that Madame de Kerbriant hates me for my good luck; she has quarreled with Madame de l'Ortal because the latter treats me as her own daughter. You know that my husband is her godson, and there is nothing wonderful in it if she should prefer to lose the countess's friendship rather than give up Monsieur Belmont.

"I saw Monsieur de Kerbriant lately; he was in deep mourning for his father, who has left him an immense fortune. Irene was with her father; just the same commonplace little thing. She has a stiff, puritanical, English governess now. The countess need not be afraid that Miss Worth will rival her in beauty; indeed, I think she must have chosen this lady on purpose for her ugliness.

"Give my kind regards to your husband, and remember me to the Abbé Surville. I send you a thousand kisses, and remain

"Your affectionate sister,

"MARTHA BELMONT."

It will be seen that Martha had not changed: she was still cold, proud, and selfish.

"I hope her happiness may be stable," said Marie with a sigh, as she handed the letter to Lucien, "for she will never be able to bear adversity."

"How unlike you, my Marie!" said Lucien. "How cold and frivolous is her heart! Who would believe she was your sister? We are strangers to her, and I can not feel any sympathy for her."

"Lucien, try to love her, if only because I do, and because she is our sister."

V

Not long after the foregoing conversation, some important purchases happened to make Lucien's presence in Paris a matter of necessity. He would have been glad if his wife could have accompanied him, but she was unable to accede to his wish, as her personal superintendence was still indispensable in the shop.

She endeavored to make up for this disappointment, by charging Lucien on no account to neglect going to see Martha. She gave him numerous messages to be repeated to her sister, and loaded him with sundry little presents which she hoped would be acceptable, coming as they did from herself. She almost thought that she had not said half enough when the time for her husband's departure came, and pursued him with messages and recommendations.

Lucien was lavish of promises, till at last the postboy cracked his whip, and the horses started at a sharp trot.

Marie looked anxiously after the coach, in

which she would fain have taken her seat, that she might go to her beloved sister.

On his arrival in Paris, Monsieur Dalbau first dispatched his business, so as to be able to have a day or two free for his visit to his sister-in-law. He had let her know that he was in town, and Martha had sent him word that she would be happy to see him as soon as possible, and that she was at home every morning after ten o'clock.

As soon as his affairs permitted, Monsieur Dalbau presented himself at her house. A porter, wearing a handsome blue and white livery, opened the door and showed him across a small court-yard, planted with gay flowers. At the inner door, a footman, who looked him carelessly over from head to foot, took his card and handed it to another servant. The latter begged him to follow, and led him through several handsomely furnished rooms; then, having come to the last drawing-room, he wheeled forward an arm-chair and left the guest, to go and take Madame's orders. A few minutes after this, there entered a smart lady's-maid, who courtesied, and said,

"Madame expects you, monsieur: will you be so kind as to follow me?"

Martha generally sat in a small boudoir, not far from the drawing-room. She was now lying on an ornamented couch, dressed in a delicate

morning *negligé*, which made her beauty, if possible, more apparent than ever. Lucien was quite dazzled and involuntarily came to a stand-still. Martha got up and advanced a step or two, saying:

"You are welcome, monsieur." Then turning to her maid, she added, "Celestine, go and tell Monsieur Belmont that Monsieur Dalbau is here."

When they were alone, she pointed to a chair, and resumed,

"I am very glad to see you, monsieur. You have good news to give me of my sister, I trust. I am sorry she was unable to accompany you."

"Marie's presence could not be done without at home," said Lucien a little awkwardly, so embarrassed did he feel by this ceremonious reception. "She would have been delighted to see you again, and she begged me to say that not a day passes but what she thinks lovingly of you. She hopes that you may be induced to visit our old Brittany some day."

"I fear that is impossible, as I already told Marie. Monsieur Belmont, having just established a banking firm, can not leave Paris, and I am therefore deprived of a pleasure which will have to be postponed till I don't know when. Do you stay long in town yourself, monsieur?"

"I shall leave to-morrow night."

"Well, then, you must give us one day. I ex-

pect no one to-day. Let us spend our time *en famille*. You must make my husband's acquaintance."

Lucien bowed.

"And how are my old friends?" said Martha.

"The Abbé Surville is getting old, but his health is still excellent. Mother Yvonne, on the contrary, seems to grow younger every day, as she performs her motherly duties of taking care of Marie's work-women and apprentices."

"Oh! yes; I think my sister spoke of a shop she had opened, in partnership with Madame Dalbau."

"Marie became my mother's partner last November, and I owe to that circumstance the happiness of having obtained her for my wife."

"I am interested in all that concerns Marie. May I ask if your business prospers?"

"Well, I can only do things on a small scale just yet, but I have had nothing to complain of."

"I am glad to hear it," said Martha.

The conversation flagged, and Martha's manner seemed constrained. Her words were cold and her expression rather scornful, so that Monsieur Dalbau, embarrassed by his sister-in-law's reserve, began to think that it would be as well to shorten his visit.

Just then Monsieur Belmont came in. He was about twenty-six, with refinement and good-

breeding marked in every detail of his manner; but an anxious expression cast a gloom on his face, naturally a cheerful one, and his black hair was streaked with gray near the spare, blue-veined temples.

He was evidently under the sway of some painful and continual anxiety; but as he approached Monsieur Dalbau, his look cleared, and putting out his hand, he went eagerly up to him.

"Good morning, my brother," he said, as Lucien rose. "I was impatiently waiting for your business to be over, that you might come and see us. I was anxious to know my wife's relations. Oh! yes," he added, as he caught Lucien's look of astonishment, "I know my sister quite well, without ever having seen her. I have read her letters, and they reveal a devoted heart and a noble soul."

"You have judged her rightly," said Lucien.

"I have something against you," said Monsieur Belmont, smiling. "Why did you not come here instead of lodging at the hotel? That was unkind of you."

"My business," answered Lucien, "was in quite another part of the town, and I could not have thought of giving you so much trouble."

"Trouble!" echoed Monsieur Belmont. "What do you mean? You are my brother."

Martha, who had listened impatiently, now interrupted her husband.

"I will leave you now," she said abruptly; "I must dress for luncheon."

The two brothers-in-law were left alone, and quickly made friends. Monsieur Belmont was affectionate and eager to please, and Monsieur Dalbau soon forgot the uncomfortable impression which Martha's conduct had left on his mind.

Monsieur Belmont anxiously questioned Lucien about his wife, his mother, and the Abbé Surville, and listened complacently to Lucien's answers and his eager praise of his wife Marie. The two men were getting quite confidential when Martha sent word to them that luncheon was ready.

"We shall be friends, shall we not?" said Belmont, as he shook hands with his brother-in-law. "Well, since we are brothers and friends, let us have done with ceremony. Call me Albéric."

"Yes, let us be brothers and friends," said Dalbau, returning the other's warm pressure, "and call me Lucien."

The two men left the room arm in arm.

The luncheon passed off well. Madame Belmont unbent a little, and Lucien forgave her attempts at dignity for the sake of her husband's hearty cordiality. Monsieur Belmont asked Lucien, after the meal was over, to come and see the garden, where they could smoke comfortably and be out of the way.

Lucien was delighted; but addressing Martha, he said,

"And will you not come, too, sister?"

"Thank you; I will wait your return here," she answered. "I have a few orders to give. Besides," she added, with an equivocal smile, "I might disturb your confidential communications."

The two men bowed and withdrew.

VI.

THE garden was really beautiful. There were *parterres* of rare and brilliant flowers, groves of foreign and native trees, long gravel walks adorned with statues. A thick maze occupied one end, and from it rose two Chinese arbors. In the centre of the maze was a rocky grotto, where a jet of water murmured in a marble basin and trickled out forming a tiny rill, which ran wandering through the garden, and emptied itself into a little lake. Around this lake were planted weeping willows, whose hanging branches swept the wavelets rippling in the breeze. Lucien was delighted.

"How fortunate you are, Albéric," he said, "to be able to fly for refuge to such an oasis, even in the middle of this whirlpool called Paris. Here you hear nothing but the harmonious sounds of nature. I am sure your wife must spend much of her time here, among these marvels of nature and art."

"It was on her account," answered Belmont, "that I took pleasure in embellishing this garden,

which the former owners had shamefully neglected. I thought that Martha would gladly have preferred home joys to the excitement of the world; but alas! I was mistaken."

Monsieur Belmont's features expressed such grief as he said these words, that Lucien was sorry to have recalled Martha to his memory.

"I beg your pardon, Albéric; I did not mean to call up any painful recollections. I did not know——"

"Listen to me, Lucien: you are my brother, and though I have only known you a few hours, I already appreciate your character. You are kind and true, and will not betray my confidence. If I tell you the secret bitterness of my heart, it will be in order to have the satisfaction of knowing that I have at least one true friend who can comfort me, and feel for me in my troubles. Let us go in here," he said as he turned into one of the arbors; "no one will disturb us; this is where I spend my many lonely hours."

Having drawn forward two rustic chairs, and shut the arbor door, Monsieur Belmont went on.

"The first time I met Martha, her beauty dazzled me, and her modest demeanor quite won my heart. I endowed her in imagination with every possible virtue; I thought it impossible that one so lovely should have any thing but a lovely moral nature. The Baroness de l'Ortal,

my godmother, had also noticed Martha and took an interest in her; it was through her good offices that I learnt that Madame de Kerbriant, being a vain woman, and tenaciously proud of her former beauty, did not spare the young governess any humiliation in her power, and was jealous of the girl's success. I was not long making up my mind. I asked Madame de l'Ortal to find some means of having Martha at her house, that she might study her disposition, and induce her to think favorably of marrying me. The baroness fell in with my plans, and told Monsieur de Kerbriant, who had no objection to offer. I saw Martha again at my godmother's house, and every time I was more in love than ever. She seemed so gentle and retiring! At last we were married, and for a few days I was perfectly happy. That happiness has fled forever."

Monsieur Belmont hid his face in his hands.

"It is not that I believe her to be really heartless, but that her tastes and character are in perpetual opposition to my own. I had a fortune amounting to four hundred thousand francs. The income of this sum is sufficient to enable one to live comfortably and hold one's position very securely, but it does not suffice for great and expensive dissipation. I had drawn such a sweet fancy picture of our quiet home, and the tranquil joys I should taste in the society of a beautiful,

clever, loving wife, but how rudely I was undeceived!"

"Are you sure there is no exaggeration?" asked Lucien gently.

"Quite sure. Martha cares for nothing but large parties, great crowds, the society of artists who are forever dinning compliments into her ears about her beauty and her talents. Then she insists upon a numerous retinue of servants, a luxury of details far above our income, grand evening parties, concerts, etc. We had not been married three months when I found out that unless we retrenched somewhat on our expenses, I should not be able to pay my way. I spoke to Martha about it, but she would not listen to me. I took a desperate resolution, and established a bank. I was fortunate enough to succeed in my mercantile enterprises, and was able to supply my wife with means to live according to her tastes; and I should be quite content if she compensated me for my efforts in her behalf by even a few concessions; if she only gave me a few moments of her time, to lift the cares of business from my weary mind. I expected this happy change to come about, but in vain; Martha is so full of her friends that she quite forgets the person who should be her only friend."

Monsieur Belmont ceased speaking; his grief seemed very heavy upon him.

"Let us always hope, dear brother," said Lucien, pressing his hand. "Martha is so young: she will weary of these worldly pleasures, and her heart will turn to you some day."

"I dare not hope it. I have fathomed her character, and found selfishness and vanity at the bottom. You are happier, Lucien. Marie's letters, which I read, moved me strangely. I would give all I have in the world if Martha could be like her sister. How sorry I was not to be present at your marriage! My wife knew that she would meet several of her friends in Switzerland, and she would neither give up nor put off her trip. Why, what is the matter, Lucien?" he added, as he noticed his brother-in-law's sudden movement.

"Nothing, nothing," hastily said Lucien, who did not like to tell Belmont that Martha had made out that the Swiss trip was entirely her husband's affair. "Never mind, Albéric," he went on, "do not despair. I am sure Martha will appreciate your devotion some day, and reward you with her truest affection."

"I will try to accept your prophecy. But it is getting late: let us go back to my wife's room; she must want to ask you so many things, and she would hardly thank me for usurping all your time."

Monsieur Dalbau had not the heart to say

that Martha had seemed but too weary of his presence before. Belmont's words had grieved him, and he was loth to add to his brother-in-law's trouble by giving him this new proof of his wife's heartlessness.

VII.

ALBERIC and Lucien left the garden.

"Where is your mistress, Celestine?" said Monsieur Belmont, as he entered the drawing-room.

"Madame is in her own room," said the maid, leaving the apartment.

"Lucien, wait for me a moment; I will go and fetch my wife."

Monsieur Dalbau thought sadly over the revelations of his brother-in-law's home life, and Marie seemed more lovable than ever in his eyes. He was left alone a long while; Monsieur Belmont seemed to have forgotten him. At last the noise of an altercation was heard through the thin partition. The reader may remember that Martha's boudoir was next to the drawing-room.

"I tell you, Martha," the voice of Belmont was heard repeating in a high key, "that you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Is not Monsieur Dalbau your brother?"

"Of course, I don't deny that," said Martha

snappishly; "but is that any reason why we should make ourselves ridiculous in the eyes of the ladies we expect?"

"What do you mean by making ourselves ridiculous?"

"Do you suppose that Monsieur Dalbau's company will be agreeable to Madame de Maillebois and Lady Peebles? Has he the manners and tone of a man used to good society?"

"I knew you were proud, Martha, but I did not believe you heartless. Do you mean to give up your relations for a set of people who only laugh at your pretensions?"

"My pretensions, indeed! I will not be spoken to so! Keep your brother-in-law in the house for good, if you like, and neglect for his sake the society of those influential people who crowd round me; that is your affair; but do not expect that I am going to constitute myself his very humble servant. I only asked him to stay because I thought no one would come. What do you think the Countess and Lady Peebles will say when they hear Monsieur Dalbau, *cabinet-maker*, announced?"

"And I should like to know who and what *you* would be, if it were not for your marriage," angrily cried Monsieur Belmont. "Martha, take care; you will tempt me to say things I should be sorry for later on. Just think about what you

mean to do, and follow my advice for once. Will you do nothing for my sake?"

"Let me alone; I know well enough what I have to do. Spare me your advice; I hear the carriages at the door already."

Monsieur Belmont apparently spoke again, but Lucien could not distinguish his words, so hoarse was his voice as he said them.

Monsieur Dalbau, blushing with anger and shame, would fain have left the house at once after the conversation he had unintentionally overheard, had not the thought of his brother-in-law come to chase this resolution from his mind. He determined to find some pretext which might satisfy Monsieur Belmont, for he felt he could no longer trust himself in Martha's presence, and he wished at the same time to avoid being the cause of any further estrangement between the husband and wife. These thoughts were passing confusedly through his mind when Martha and her husband came in together; and almost simultaneously the doors opened wide, and the servant announced,

"The Countess de Maillebois and Lady Peebles."

Martha eagerly welcomed her guests.

"How kind of you," she exclaimed, "to give me a little of your valuable time!"

"I would not pass through Paris without see-

ing you, my dear," said Lady Peebles, a tall Englishwoman with a haughty countenance. "You are the only person I shall have time to see, for you know I have just left Geneva, and start tomorrow morning for London."

"And I, my dear," said the countess, "I am too fond of you to let any opportunity of seeing you slip by. You are more blooming than ever, dear little friend. Is not that Monsieur Belmont?"

"It is," said Albéric, coming forward. "And your most humble servant, ladies. Allow me to introduce my brother-in-law, Monsieur Dalbau."

Lucien bowed, while the two ladies returned his civility by a formal and rather supercilious nod. Martha and her friends began to talk; no one noticed Monsieur Belmont, still less Lucien. Time passed, and dinner was announced. Monsieur Belmont gave Lady Peebles his arm, and led her into the dining-room; but the countess, seeing Lucien approach her, quickly locked her arm in Martha's, and stalked forward. Madame Belmont was minutely courteous toward her lady guests, and though not absolutely uncivil to her brother-in-law, treated him with utter indifference. The two men were on thorns; both were hurt at Madame Belmont's pointed behavior. When dinner was over, and the company

had adjourned to the drawing-room, the two ladies began making sundry excuses, and hastened their departure.

Alone once more, Lucien turned to say good-by to Belmont.

"What!" cried the latter, "you are going now; I thought you had promised not to leave till to-morrow night?"

"I said so, because I thought that I should find a welcome here," Lucien answered very quietly. "Albéric, I shall never forget you, and you may command my services whenever you have need of them. Madame," he added, turning to Martha, "I hope you will forgive me the trouble I have given you: I feel that it would be unbecoming in me to add to it to-night. Still, if you should wish to go to Rennes to see your sister, believe me when I tell you that it will be a great happiness for my wife, and that I shall share in the pleasure it will give her."

He left the room without waiting for a reply; Albéric followed him.

"I will go with you to the hotel," said the latter.

"I shall leave at once," answered Lucien. "I have got through my business, and have no other reason for staying any longer in town."

"Well, then, I will go with you to the coach. It is a great disappointment to me to miss the

whole of to-morrow, which I had reckoned on spending with you. But I hardly dare to ask you to alter your present plans."

"You are right, Albéric. Martha's manner hurt me too much: I could not risk another such interview; but as it would make Marie very unhappy to know the truth, you may be sure I shall say nothing about it to her."

"Thanks; but do not forget to speak to her of my affection for her."

Lucien was soon ready to start, and the two men went together to the coach-office. There was one seat unoccupied, and the coach was just about to leave. Monsieur Dalbau got in, and shaking hands with Monsieur Belmont, said heartily,

"Good-by, Albéric; may you be happy, for you deserve it."

"Good-by, Lucien," answered the other. "Would to God your wish might come true! Remember me affectionately as your brother."

VIII.

MARIE was expecting her husband's return with the utmost impatience, and fancied that he would have no end of pleasant things to say about Martha's welcome to him.

"He is so good," she said to Madame Dalbau, "that I am sure my sister will be delighted to know him. Even if poor Martha was a little neglectful or indifferent in her manner toward me, I know she loved me in her heart, and you will see that my husband will have every reason to be pleased with her reception of him, as he will remind her of me."

Madame Dalbau did not reply: she knew more of Martha's character than the kind-hearted Marie would see or take notice of.

"I wish I were in Lucien's place, or at least with him," continued the young wife; "how I envy him his seeing and embracing my sister! I never knew my work seem wearisome before, but now I chafe under the necessity of remaining behind, on account of my business! Still I hope Lucien may have induced Martha to promise us a visit. Who knows? perhaps he will bring her with him!"

This was the way Marie spent her time, allow-

ing a feverish impatience to prey upon her mind; it was all she could do not to start for Paris to join her husband. She would stand for an hour every morning at her window, or at the open shop-door, watching for the postman; but although Lucien had been gone a fortnight, she had got no letter except such as referred to his affairs. Then one came, telling her that he would call on her sister the following day, at which news Marie grew more thoughtful than ever, coming and going as if in a dream, and caressing the little girl Martha, whom she would not let out of her sight the whole day. In vain Madame Dalbau tried to soothe her; the young wife had nothing to say to her kind old friend but such broken sentences as these:

"Do not scold me, mother: I am so fond of my Martha! I should have been so happy if I could only have seen her! . . Leave me alone to think of her. . . Why could I not go with Lucien?"

Two days went by, and the second evening after the receipt of Lucien's letter, Marie was just closing the shop, when her husband arrived.

"What! Lucien, is it you!" cried Marie, trembling with anxiety. "Did you not see Martha?"

"Yes, dear, I saw her," said Lucien, kissing first his wife, then his mother whom Marie's startled exclamation had called to her side.

"But it was only yesterday that you were to have seen her. You can not have been with her more than a few hours, since you are back already. She is not ill, is she?"

"No, no, do not distress yourself; she is quite well, but we will talk about her when I am a little rested."

Then, as he noticed the anxious look that gathered on Marie's countenance, he added,

"Your sister's first inquiry was about you, dearest."

"Oh! thanks, Lucien," she cried, as a happy expression chased away her anxiety. "I was not mistaken after all, mother." And she cheerfully busied herself in helping her husband to take off his coat, and get rid of the many small parcels that weighed down his pockets. She would have asked Lucien at once about his interview with her sister; but Madame Dalbau gently reminded her that her son must need a rest after his journey, at which remonstrance Marie became ashamed of her importunity, and consented to put off the happy explanation till the next day.

Before she went to sleep, she knelt to thank God specially for the kind thoughts which her sister had had of her: poor child, she little knew for what she was so thankful! She rose with the lark the next morning, so impatient was she to get the promised news of Martha, and to cheat her-

self, went straight to the work-room, and tried to find something to do. The girls were all at work, a certain press of business having made it necessary that they should begin earlier than usual. While she was thus employed, Monsieur Dalbau went to his mother's room and quietly told her all.

"What shall we do?" he asked. "What do advise me to do, mother?"

"Marie must know nothing of it, especially after what she said last night. The shock would be too great for her, poor child; let her never know how unworthy Martha is of her love. I think that without absolutely telling an untruth, you might pass over what so justly hurt you, and find some plausible pretext to explain your hurried departure."

"You are right, but I dread the many questions which I know Marie will put. I will do my best to blind her to the truth: I have no idea of Madame Belmont's causing a break in our domestic peace. Besides, I can at least extol my brother-in-law to the skies; that is one comfort. Poor man, he deserves a better wife; pity there was not one like Marie for him."

"Hush," said Madame Dalbau; "I hear the sound of footsteps; Marie will have found out that you have come here."

It was as she said, and Marie now came in.

"I can not wait any longer, Lucien," she said

coaxingly; "you will tell me all about Martha now, won't you, dear?"

Lucien did as he was told, and succeeded in satisfactorily explaining away the unpleasantness of his visit to his sister-in-law. He answered all Marie's questions, while she fairly cried with delight at receiving such good news. Then he spoke of Monsieur Belmont; he could be eloquent enough on this subject, and drew such a picture of Albéric, that Marie soon shared his enthusiasm, and congratulated herself on having so charming and distinguished a brother-in-law.

She was overjoyed to think that Martha's happiness was intrusted to such hands; and having not the slightest suspicion that Monsieur Dalbau was concealing any thing from her, could not rest before Mother Yvonne and the Abbé Surville had come to share her joy. She felt sure now that Martha had not mistaken her vocation, and she wished her friends to be likewise assured of it. The good priest was skeptical, but warily hid his suspicions; Lucien, however, of whom he made private inquiries, told him the truth. "I feared it, spite of myself," said the kind old man. "An ungrateful daughter and a selfish sister, Martha could scarcely be a good wife. God forgive her, and may He forbear to punish her too heavily in the future."

IX.

FIFTEEN months of unbroken peace passed over the Dalbaus' household, and the young couple were blessed during that time with a little boy, whom Lucien named Albéric, after his brother-in-law. Old Madame Dalbau and Yvonne often disputed over the prize, as to which should take especial care of the baby, who was now almost six months old.

Monsieur Belmont wrote often to his relations at Rennes; he too had become a father within the last ten months, when Martha presented him with twin daughters. He told Lucien in several confidential letters that he grieved to say that his wife, far from moderating her expenses, had launched into still more extravagant display, and insisted on living like a queen. Martha herself only wrote to her sister once, and then it was but to say that Monsieur Belmont had just had a stroke of remarkable luck in his banking transactions, and had realized

sudden and enormous profits. This letter arrived just about the time at which our story reopens.

Marie was sitting in the dining-room one day, her child on her knee, and Madame Dalbau and Yvonne leaning against the table. They were waiting for Lucien. All three looked anxious, especially Marie, as she pressed her child convulsively to her bosom.

Lucien came in at last, with a saddened countenance, and before taking his seat at the table, went silently up to his wife and kissed both her and the boy. The dinner was but a melancholy meal; sorrow and trouble seemed to brood over the house which we formerly knew as a model of calm happiness.

"Well, Lucien," said Marie, after a long pause, "did you see Monsieur Legrand?"

"Yes, I did," he answered slowly.

"And he agrees to a compromise?" asked the wife, with faltering voice.

"He has refused."

"O heavens! what is to be done, then? I will go and see him myself; perhaps he will have pity on me."

"I told him all that you could tell him, dear. I explained to him that this St. Malo firm, which gave me the commission for exportation, is now bankrupt, and is therefore unable to meet its en-

gagements with me, and that, in this extremity, nothing remains to me but to sell off all the furniture I have in my work-shops. To get rid of so large a quantity, however, some little time will be necessary; and if they are sold by auction, they will bring in next to nothing, since they will be bought at prices far below cost. He would not heed me. 'Pay me at once,' he kept repeating. 'I too have engagements to meet, and I can't afford to wait.'"

"But," urged Marie, "did you tell him that my shop will help us to pay the greater part of the sum due him, in less than a year?"

"He would not listen to such a suggestion. If a sale would clear me, I would not mind; but if I am to be declared a bankrupt, the sale would not cover half my debt, and I should feel dishonored forever."

Monsieur Dalbau hid his face in his hands, while Marie, speechless with grief, clasped her child close to her bosom, as if to protect him from the danger that threatened his parents. Madame Dalbau and Yvonne were crying in silence, but after a few moments' pause, Marie took courage and spoke. "How much time will Monsieur Legrand give you, Lucien?" she said, addressing her husband.

"Ten days."

"And what is the whole amount of the debt?"

"Twenty thousand francs, of which I offer him ten thousand down, but he refused and said he would take all or nothing. If I am declared a bankrupt, my other creditors will come down upon me, and the ten thousand francs which I could collect by making use of all the resources at my command and drawing on the capital which my mother leaves at my disposal, would not even give each a proper share. How my hopes have been deceived; and I had so built upon the fine profits I was to get from this exportation commission! Poor Marie, and you, mother, I shall soon be a cause of trouble and sorrow to you both. Can you forgive me?"

"Forgive you!" cried Marie, as she set her child on Lucien's knee, and put her arms round his neck. "What have we to forgive, darling? This trouble has not come upon us through any fault of yours, and God is the arbiter of our fate at all times; let us hope in Him."

"Poor, dear children," sighed Madame Dalbau, "why am I not a rich woman, so that I might remedy this strait!"

"Mother dear," said Lucien reproachfully, "have you not done enough, and more than we had any right to expect, when you forced us to draw upon your savings, your only safeguard in case of evil days falling upon you?"

"And how could *I* have lived in security and

know my children to be in want?" said Madame Dalbau.

"Oh, if I only had something to give you," said poor Yvonne: "how proud I should be if you would take it! But I have nothing left but my hearty good-will," she added, while tears ran down her cheeks; "and I can still spin; so I will look for work, and not be a burden to you any longer."

"What do you mean, Mother Yvonne? you would leave us!" cried Lucien and Marie in one breath. "No, indeed," continued the young man. "What distresses me in this ruinous perspective is the dishonor which will attach to my reputation; for after all, I hope to be able to pay all my creditors in the long run, out of the profits of the work-shop itself. Poor little Albéric!" he added, as he kissed his baby son.

"Let us hope, even against hope," said Marie, "we may get out of this trouble in a way we little expect. God will surely not forsake us."

X.

UNABLE to conceal her emotion, and yet loth to increase Lucien's grief by a display of her own, Marie retreated to her room, where she threw herself on her knees before a little image of Our Lady, the same which had formerly cheered her poor garret.

"Holy Mother," she cried in her anguish, "have pity on my husband and my child!"

Her tears choked her, and for a long time she remained thus, plunged in painful thoughts, till at last she roused herself, and tried to cast about her for some means by which to extricate themselves from the threatened danger. What was to be done? How could the ten thousand francs be procured, which were wanting to the full sum owing to Monsieur Legrand?

A thousand wild plans suggested themselves to her mind, but none seemed feasible, when Marie at last mechanically cast her eyes on a little writing-desk that stood in a corner of the room. It was open, and on the ledge lay Martha's last letter. A thought struck her. She rushed to the desk, and, seizing the letter, said to

herself, "Why did I not think of this before? Martha tells me that her husband has just realized enormous profits; she can not refuse to lend us the sum we want. Heaven itself has sent this suggestion at last. We are safe now!"

She sat down, trembling with feverish agitation, and quickly wrote the following letter:

"DEAREST MARTHA: My only hope is in you. Since my last letter we have been very unfortunate. My husband had received a large order from a firm in St. Malo, which he executed; but was obliged to get credit to the amount of twenty thousand francs. This we were perfectly justified in doing, as the price proposed was sufficient to cover this debt, and leave us a handsome profit besides. All was ready, and Lucien wrote to tell his customers so; when the news came suddenly upon us that the St. Malo firm had stopped payment. We represented these facts to our creditor, but he would not listen to reason. All we can do will not yield us more than half the sum required; but with time, and by selling off all our effects, as well as by curtailing our daily expenses, we could weather the storm. On the other hand, if we are forced to sell quickly and at a disadvantage, we shall be altogether ruined, without even clearing ourselves.

"I am going to ask you, dear Martha, to help us in this strait, and to save our good name, by lending us ten thousand francs. I make this request without the slightest fear of being refused. It is for my husband's, my mother's, and my child's sake that I ask this favor of you. Think of your own husband and your two little darlings, and I know you will willingly be our guardian angel.

"It is unjust of me even to ask as if I doubted your answer; my heart tells me what yours will feel, and I thank you beforehand. I can not love you more dearly than I do, but gratitude will henceforth be added to love.

"Your affectionate sister,

"MARIE DALBAU."

A sigh of relief escaped her when she had finished this letter. "Yes," she commented, as she read it over to herself, "Martha will understand. She may be careless, but she is affectionate at bottom, and she will not leave us in want, when to help us will not even take one pleasure from her life." It was long before Marie made up her mind as to whether she should show this letter to her husband or not. She remembered that Lucien had sometimes let fall hints far from complimentary to her sister; and she feared that he would hesitate to make use of this expedient,

though she was sure it would be successful. She sent the letter off at last without his knowledge, and longed for the answer, which she confidently expected to be according to her wishes, and which she would be so proud to show to Lucien, to convince him of her sister's real kind-heartedness. "I am sure," she thought, "that Martha will not delay her answer; she, too, is a wife and a mother. What would I not do for her, if the situation were reversed?" She forgot that her sister was incapable of sympathizing with any trouble that did not personally inconvenience herself. She judged Martha by her own standard, and we have seen how fallacious was this ideal estimate. She got the letter posted by one of her work-women, on whom she enjoined the strictest secrecy, and joined her mother and husband again with a lighter heart than she had had an hour ago.

The hours passed wearily, spite of Marie's efforts to enliven her family circle. Monsieur Dalbau could not take his eyes off his wife and his mother, and sadly speculated on the chances of those loved ones being condemned to a life of penury and wretchedness; while as to his child, who was peacefully slumbering in Marie's arms, the little innocent added untold pangs to his father's grief.

A few days went by, and Marie anxiously

waited for the Paris letter, which was still delayed, while Lucien had in the mean while taken a daring resolve. "I will ask Albéric," he thought; "Martha told us that he had been very fortunate not long ago. It is impossible I should sue to *him* in vain; he is too good and generous to hesitate for an instant." Monsieur Dalbau's letter was written, and he was on his way to the post-office, when the postman met him in the street, and handed him a letter in his brother-in-law's handwriting, addressed to him, and marked private. Monsieur Dalbau tore it open and read it as he walked along; but the very first lines seemed to cause him some painful revulsion of feeling. Walking hurriedly back, he shut himself up in his office to read the note without fear of interruption. This was what met his eye:

"MY DEAR LUCIEN: You are the only friend I have who cares to know my troubles; the only one whom my sad confidences can not weary; the only one who is aware of my inner feelings, and who knows how wretched I am.

"I want your friendship and support more than ever. I am indeed an object of pity, for I am losing every thing at one blow. And, worse than all, it is Martha, whom I have loved so dearly, and for whom I would have given my heart's blood, who is at the bottom of all my

troubles. Having already shown herself an undutiful wife, she now seems to me a heartless mother; and having irretrievably compromised my happiness, she crowns all by ruining the future of our children. Her extravagant love of display has been ever on the increase. I have not spared advice, remonstrances, entreaties; but in vain; and I have even been forced outwardly to countenance her folly, for fear of ruining her good name and reputation. There is no peace for me, my friend.

"Every day brings some new whim, and the profits of the bank are swallowed up beforehand. Nay, more, I am in constant receipt of bills which show me that not only does Martha remorselessly use every penny of my hard-earned wealth, but that, to satisfy on the instant her slightest freak, she does not hesitate to have recourse to debts. How long can this last? I hardly know yet; but this I am sure of, that we are fast approaching a catastrophe, and that in a very short time I shall be literally unable to keep pace with Martha's expenses, and shall be blazoned forth to the world as a dishonest man and a bankrupt.

"I wish I might never see my wife again. I almost hate her, for she has no heart, no feeling. If I were the only one whom it concerned, I should feel more resigned; but what will become of my poor children, Valentine and Marie, in the

hands of a mother to whom they are an eyesore and a burden?

"Lucien, I am thoroughly wretched. How I wish I had you near me, to comfort and support me in this trial! Whatever may happen, never forget your friendship for me. I have no heart to write at greater length.

"Believe me, your affectionate brother,

"ALBERIC BELMONT."

Monsieur Dalbau was struck dumb by this ominous letter. A thousand dark thoughts swam confusedly before him. His brother-in-law ruined and dishonored, and his own last chance of retrieving himself gone! Monsieur Belmont alone could have helped him to weather the storm; but without this help there was nothing to be done but bow down under the threatened trial! But after a while, Lucien's unselfish heart got the upper hand, and he forgot his own troubles to think seriously of Albéric's. "Alas!" he said to himself, "I pity you from my heart, brother; for in the midst of your hardships you have no Marie to comfort you."

He was surprised, when he entered his wife's shop, to find both her and his mother crying bitterly over a letter. He quickly asked the reason of this new grief, and Marie answered, in a whisper,

"I fear I must tell you, dear. I thought that

Martha would have helped us, and I wrote to her to ask her. This is the answer I have just received."

Lucien took it, and read as follows:

"DEAR MARIE: I wish I could do you the service you ask of me. Unfortunately, it is out of my power at the present time.

"It is true that my husband lately realized enormous sums; but as fast as he makes money, he uses it for his own purposes, and my expenditure is reduced to the smallest amount. I never have any thing at my own disposal. I have often asked Monsieur Belmont to add to the yearly allowance which he makes me for my dress and household expenses; but his tastes are diametrically opposed to mine, and he would hear of no further concession. I can not, therefore, apply to him; besides, it would be impossible for me to humble myself so, seeing the many reasons I have for being displeased with his behavior toward me.

"How could Monsieur Dalbau undertake any thing so risky as the affair you mention? He should be more prudent. Forgive me, dear, for this suggestion; and believe me, I am truly distressed that I can do nothing for you. Monsieur Belmont's generosity is not such as to warrant my making any such serious demand upon it. Good-by, Marie dear; let us hope that some lucky

chance will relieve you from your present embarrassment. It is the sincere wish of

"Your affectionate sister,

"MARTHA BELMONT."

Lucien was unable to contain his indignation.

"Is it not enough for her to have been the bane of a good man's life, that she must needs calumniate him into the bargain? See, Marie, this is the truth. Read it, and judge for yourself."

And Lucien held out the letter he had just received from his brother-in-law. Marie glanced hastily over it, but the shock was too great. A mist swam before her eyes, and she fell senseless to the ground. Lucien grew frightened, and reproached himself for his undue haste in so abruptly undeceiving her. Madame Dalbau and Yvonne wept aloud, fearing, not without reason, that the sad news thus suddenly told might prove fatal to the gentle Marie. Lucien flung himself on his knees, mad with grief, and besought his wife to look at him, speak to him. . . .

At last Marie slowly opened her eyes, and a flood of tears relieved her oppressed heart.

"Do not cry for me," she said, with a sad smile. "I am strong, and can bear this hard trial. Poor brother!" she added, "how wretched he must be! O my Martha!" she said in a whisper, "how could you deceive me so cruelly?"

XI.

LET us leave Rennes, and transport ourselves to Paris, to Monsieur Belmont's pretty home. It is now eight o'clock in the evening, and the last preparations are being made for a ball which is to be given there this very night. Martha is lying down in her boudoir, resting from the fatigue of superintending the workmen who had been engaged all day in the decoration of the rooms. Her beauty is as brilliant as ever, but the hard, haughty, scornful expression of her face is enough to take even from beauty its most incontestable charms. She is evidently engaged in no pleasant train of thought, and her lips tightly drawn together tell of vexation and worry. She was just about to touch the bell to summon her maid, when her husband came into the room. She received him with an impatient exclamation, which she did not even take the trouble to repress, and which showed plainly enough how unwelcome his presence was to her; but Monsieur Belmont did not seem to notice

it, and stood quietly with folded arms before his handsome wife.

He was sadly changed; his cheeks were hollow and his eyes sunken, though lit up with unnatural and feverish brilliancy; his hair had almost turned gray.

"Martha," he said in a low, dejected tone. "I must speak to you."

"Do you not see that it is impossible at this time? I shall barely have time to dress before my guests arrive."

"You may well say *my guests*, for they are certainly not mine, Martha. But never mind; I am forced to detain you a moment; I have to speak to you of myself, and of our children."

"Celestine is waiting to dress me; I can not possibly spare you a moment to-night."

She rose and opened her dressing-room door, but Monsieur Belmont, quick as lightning, seized her wrist.

"You shall not leave the room, madame, until I allow you to go."

"What means this violence, monsieur?" cried Martha in a passion. "I shall not leave the room, say you? We shall see about that."

Again she tried the door, but Monsieur Belmont, cool and collected, barred her passage with his outstretched arm. Martha, in a fearful temper, flung herself on a sofa.

"I have to speak to you on a serious subject, madame," resumed her husband; "that is, about things which you would have known long ago had I not become as a stranger to you for many months. It is, however, impossible to hide them from you any longer. I will begin by what ought to be nearest your heart. Are you aware that your two children are dying?"

Martha was silent.

"Do you hear me? your children are dying, with no one near them to tend them but hired strangers, while their mother, whose sacred duty it is to watch over them, thinks of nothing but worldly entertainments and flattering compliments on her beauty. Is this true or not? You do not answer me? I will tell you what keeps you away from your children's sick-bed: you fear to be near them, thinking their disease catching, and that the small-pox, which has brought them to the edge of the grave, might attack you and impair the beauty of which you are so proud. Have I guessed right, madame?"

Martha was still silent, and a scornful smile curled her lips as she pretended to pay no attention to her husband's words. He went on after a pause,

"I have to tell you things which will perhaps have more power to move you. I am forced to let you know that I am a ruined

man, and that the house of Monsieur Belmont, the banker, will be sold in a few days to pay his creditors."

Martha arose to her full height and gave a long, piercing scream.

"Is that really true?" she asked huskily.

"Ah! this touches you, madame, this wounds your heart! So much the better, and may the downfall of your pride serve partly to avenge the utter downfall of my hopes of domestic happiness!"

Monsieur Belmont strode toward the door, but his wife, in a cold, hard voice, called him back, saying,

"I consider that you owe me an explanation, monsieur: how is it that you are ruined?"

"And are you ignorant of the facts, madame? Do you mean to say you do not know what hand has hurried on the crisis? I will tell you with pleasure. When I first knew you, I was delighted with your beauty and the good qualities I made sure were yours, and I unhesitatingly placed my life's happiness in your hands. What has become of it now? I had an income that was sufficient to support us in comfort and respectability; where is it now? I would scorn to throw in your face your own penniless position before I married you; for I believed myself doubly repaid for the position I gave you, by the

hopes of obtaining your affection and esteem. Three months, however, were enough to disabuse me of these hopes; I grew to be a stranger to you; but what did I not do, what entreaties did I not use, to turn your heart toward me once more? I did not know that you had no heart! My efforts were useless; but I still loved you, and that I might at least supply you with money for your extravagant tastes, I worked hard, and sacrificed my peace of mind, rather than see your vanity checked by misfortune. Did you care for me the more on this account? Day by day you grew colder and colder toward your husband, and by the company you kept, that of artists and women of doubtful character, you have even compromised your honor."

Monsieur Belmont paused a moment, then resumed,

"To crown all your bad actions, you have forsaken your own children. Have Valentine and Marie ever known a mother's tenderness? Have they even received one genuine caress since the hour they were born? This, more than any thing, has killed all vestige of my lingering love for you. Martha, you began by scorning your own relations, and ended by treading under foot the most sacred duties and the most beautiful instincts of nature."

Martha persisted in keeping a stolid silence.

"Farewell, madame," continued her husband; "this is our last meeting. I have arranged matters so as to spare you the care of your children, of whom Madame de l'Ortal has promised to take charge. Believe me when I say that I shall do all in my power to shield you from absolute penury. Your diamonds are your own, and your settlement can not be touched. Once more, Martha, farewell."

Monsieur Belmont walked slowly away, casting a glance of regret on his wife, as if he was waiting for some sign that she wished to recall him. But Martha was sunk in selfish thoughts, and her husband had been gone some time before she awoke from the stupor in which these sudden revelations had plunged her.

"Do you not wish to dress, madame?" said Celestine, interrupting her mistress's reverie; "it is nearly ten o'clock, and the guests will soon begin to arrive."

Martha looked up with a start.

"Go and tell Monsieur Belmont that I wish to say a few words to him at once," she said. The maid went to give the order. "Could it be true?" thought Martha; "if so, I hate you, Albéric; you have blighted my life and condemned me once more to poverty. Was it for *me*, then, to work in *your* interests?" Just then Celestine returned with a message.

"Monsieur Belmont left the house half an hour ago, and his valet William has orders to take him a few things to the *Hôtel de Londres;* he has just joined monsieur there."

"Very well," said Martha, full of some desperate resolve; "come and dress me, Celestine."

Madame Belmont's ball was a tremendous success, and Martha herself, in a dazzling *toilette*, did the honors with finished grace. Not a trace of any unusual emotion was visible on her beautiful countenance, and, surrounded by her favorite circle of artists, she listened complacently to their eager homage. The secret of her behavior was this:

She had thought over her situation, and had come to the conclusion that she could easily save her personal settlement from the ruin of her husband's fortune. Her jewels represented an almost equal sum, and she meant to turn many other things into ready money, things which she might fairly claim as her own. This had quite calmed her apprehensions, though her husband had fled, dishonored through her means, and her children, dying of a loathsome disease, were imprisoned in one of the attics of her splendid house!

XII.

We have not the heart to follow Martha through the details of the ball; such utter indifference is too sickening, so we will draw the curtain over those ghastly festivities, and look in upon her three days later.

Monsieur Belmont's departure was canvassed all over Paris. He had set his affairs in order before leaving, and his books were open to the inspection of all, but the expenses noted down were so boundless that those who knew little or nothing of his life could not help entertaining the most cruel suspicions against his honesty. The *habitués* of the house, however, easily guessed the truth, and knew that Madame Belmont was the primary cause of her husband's ruin.

Martha had gathered all her costly wardrobe in her bed-room, and was busy calculating how much its sale would bring her. "Surely," she thought, "I shall be very unlucky if I can not make a hundred thousand francs on all this, to which I shall add my dowry. This will come to two hundred thousand francs, which, well invested, ought to bring in an income of ten thousand.

Little enough, indeed, but let us hope! Some lucky chance may ameliorate my condition. I have friends. Clorinda de Maillebois, Lady Peebles, and Olympia de Verles are devoted to me, not to mention others whom I am forgetting. I will see them at once; no doubt they will at least know how to advise me." She rang the bell, and when her maid appeared, she gave the following order:

"Let the carriage come round at once."

"The coachman left this morning, madame, and he said he did not mean to come back."

"Is William still here?"

"William said that he could not leave so kind a master as monsieur, and he has gone to join him."

"Who *is* there, then?"

"No one but Noël, the footman, madame."

"Very well; let him drive me, then; say I want the carriage at once."

Martha left her home half an hour later, giving the order to the driver to go to Madame de Maillebois' house, a few streets distant from her own. It was about nine o'clock in the morning when Martha reached her friend's residence.

"Madame is asleep," said the wondering lady's-maid, when Madame Belmont inquired for her. "Will you please to wait?"

Martha went into the drawing-room, and in

a few minutes the maid came back to say that the countess was awake, and would see Madame de Belmont at once.

Martha hurried in to Madame de Maillebois' room, and the latter, taking her by the hand, made her sit down by the bed.

"What brings you here so early, fair friend?" she asked playfully.

"Ah Clorinda! I am so unhappy."

"And so you have come to me? I am so glad, for, do you know, I began to think you liked Olympia de Verles better than you did me. This tells me that I was mistaken. What can I do for you, dear?"

"You have heard of Monsieur Belmont's ruin?"

"It *is* true, then? I told the people who told me of it, that it was their jealousy made them believe the report! Is it possible that his bank, that seemed so secure, should have come to this?"

"It is too true, Clorinda. Monsieur Belmont told me all, with the most disgusting coolness, just three days ago. But he was not content with this, he wished to break my heart as well. He never loved me. What do you think he has done to make my desolation complete?"

"I can not think."

"He has taken away my children, my sweet

little girls, and placed them under the care of Madame de l'Ortal, as if I, their mother, were incapable of taking care of them. Is it not too cruel?"

"Dreadful!" echoed Madame de Maillebois, with an ironical inflection in her voice; "every one knew how devoted you were to the little darlings, and how you loved them."

Martha did not fail to detect the sarcasm, but carefully abstained from noticing it.

"Under these circumstances, dear Clorinda, I thought I might venture to rely upon your aid. I am sure I am not mistaken. I can not at the present moment obtain any ready money; would you mind advancing me a small sum until Monsieur de Belmont's affairs are wound up?"

"It is unfortunately out of my power just now," said the countess curtly. "I have had losses myself this year. My farmers were in distress, and I had to forgive them the greater part of their rent. I could not possibly draw upon the money I have in hand without seriously inconveniencing myself, and, in fact, leaving myself short of funds, which would necessitate a loan before the year is out. Now a loan is always a dangerous remedy, not to say a dishonest one; for one seldom has recourse to it unless one's affairs are so muddled as not to allow a fair prospect of repaying it. Believe me, my dear, I am very sorry to be so situ-

ated just now. I hope you will come and see me again; your visits are always a great pleasure to me."

Clorinda de Maillebois lazily closed her eyes as she said these last words, and seemed very much inclined to continue her morning's nap.

Martha rose, bowed slightly, and withdrew: her vanity was sadly hurt, the more so as she heard these words, which the countess took care to say in a loud key as soon as the velvet *portière* fell behind her visitor,

"Rosa, whenever Madame Belmont calls again, I shall not be at home."

"Ah!" thought Martha, as she re-entered her carriage; "she need not fear my importunities any further, the ungrateful woman! But surely Lady Peebles will make up to me for this slight."

Lady Peebles lived in a hired house in the Rue du Beanne, where she spent six months out of every twelve. Envious busybodies affirmed that she had no right to the title she bore, and that her father had been a hatter and her husband a haberdasher. Both trades must have paid well, for after Jonathan Peebles' death, his widow set out in great state on a lengthened tour through Europe, and claimed the title of Lady Peebles. She was among the women of doubtful character against whom Monsieur Belmont had often vainly warned his wife; and as for Madame de Maillebois, though

she was really a countess, she was not received in the society of her own relations for reasons known to few of her acquaintance. The trio composed of these two ladies and Olympia de Verles, every one of them undesirable companions, had been foremost in fawning upon Martha, and had always excited Monsieur Belmont's hearty disgust.

Lady Peebles met her friend very solemnly, and, pointing to a seat, asked Martha in a curt, ungracious tone, what might be the purport of her visit.

"I am here because I am in trouble," candidly said Martha; "you assured me of your friendship and devotion so often that I do not hesitate to test them now, by asking you for the loan of a small sum, pending the settlement of my husband's affairs. I am sure that with your immense fortune, you can not have the heart to forsake a friend in distress."

"My immense fortune! I am afraid you are mistaken as to its amount. I am on the point of seriously drawing in my expenses; my money was lodged for the greater part in the funds of a London ship-owner, who has just lost several vessels, and has stopped payment in consequence. You see I have not the means wherewith to help you. Monsieur Belmont deceived me as to his position; I believed him to be an honest man, but

it seems I was wrong in my estimate of his character."

Martha apathetically let this insult to her husband pass, and rose to take her leave.

"Take my advice," said Lady Peebles; "you have been a little imprudent; you made too sure that your money could never fail you. I hope this will be a wholesome lesson to you. If there is one thing to be avoided, it is straining after the same display which you formerly indulged in. I never liked to say so before, but it really went beyond the bounds of decency. Good-by now, and do not give up all for lost."

Lady Peebles held out two fingers, but Martha, refusing to see them, left the room in a sombre passion of outraged feeling. A little girl, a niece of Lady Peebles, and whom this personage brought up, was playing in the anteroom, and going up to Martha, examined her from head to foot, and took her hand, as she said,

"Are you the beautiful Madame Belmont?"

"Yes, I am Madame Belmont; but what do you want with me, little girl?"

"Well, I heard my aunt say last night that she did not mean to take any more notice of you, because you were no longer rich, and besides, never had been any thing but an upstart of a governess!"

Martha nearly lost all self-control at these

stinging words, and retreated precipitately to her carriage.

"To Madame de Verles," she cried to her coachman, naming the address. "At least," she thought passionately, "Olympia must make up to me for these slights; she whom I have laid under so many obligations, and almost saved from poverty, will she not save me in return?"

Madame de Verles was dressed to go out, and was evidently vexed by Martha's inopportune arrival.

"Dear love, I heard of your misfortune," she hastened to say, "and I should have been so glad to offer you even the slenderest help; but as you probably know, my income is very small, too small for my heart."

"I thought, Olympia, that you might have remembered our friendship," said Martha. "You always found me ready enough to sympathize with you in your troubles."

"I do not deny the many services you have rendered me," said Madame de Verles; "far from it; but at the present moment it is impossible for me to do any thing. I hope to be better situated in a few days; but excuse me, love, I have an appointment, and can not delay any longer."

"This is ingratitude, indeed, Olympia. I do not believe that you ever loved me," cried Madame Belmont.

"I scorn to notice your innuendoes, madame," answered Olympia, "and I will not bear you malice for them. Good-by for the present."

Madame de Verles left the house, and Martha drove home, sick with passion and disappointment. On her arrival, a note from Madame de l'Ortal was put into her hands. It ran as follows:

"According to Monsieur Belmont's entreaties, I went to his house to see his children. Their mother was not at home; but since I have reason to believe that she cares little or nothing for them, I had the two poor little things removed to my house with as much care as circumstances would permit. Madame Belmont need not trouble herself to inquire after them. They are in the charge of a person who will not forsake them, and who is actuated by her sincere affection for Monsieur Belmont. MADAME DE L'ORTAL."

The bailiffs were just entering the house, and the inventory was about to be drawn up when Martha finished reading this letter. "It is a hard struggle," she thought, "and every one forsakes me. But I will not yield, and I am determined to find some means of existence. I must and will. Glide from the rank and station I have so dearly won? never!"

XIII.

LET us return to the Dalbau family, whom we shall find seated in silence around the dining-table, on the eve of the day which is to see Monsieur Legrand paid in full or Lucien declared a bankrupt. No one has any appetite ; each one's countenance is pale with anxiety, and each strives to force back his own tears that he may not add to the grief of his neighbor or take from him what little fortitude he has mustered for the occasion. No sound is heard but the baby's unconscious cries, and even his crowing fails to bring the ready smile, as it always did before, to the lips of the young mother. Lucien looks the ghost of himself, and his clinched hands tremble visibly. A little apprentice runs in to announce the Abbé Surville. The company rises, in sign of respectful welcome.

"Sit still, my good friends," says the priest ; "I am not come to intrude on your grief."

"You know," answers Lucien, "that your

presence among us is always either a crown to our pleasures or a comfort in our troubles."

"Thanks," said the priest, pressing Lucien's hand. "And how is this little darling? He seems sad, too," he went on, as he kissed the baby's forehead.

"The poor child has felt neglected these last days," said Marie. "He misses the bright faces he has been used to, and I think he knows something has gone wrong."

"Well," returned the priest, "let us talk of yourselves. How is it with you?"

"Simply that I shall be a marked man to-morrow morning," said Lucien.

"There is, then, a great deal wanting to complete the sum you owe?"

"We have turned all we have into cash," said old Madame Dalbau, "but could not gather more than ten thousand francs, which is just half our debt."

"And you know of no one who could help you?"

"No. Who could, except my poor brother-in-law, who is now worse off than ourselves?" quoth Lucien.

"And did it never occur to you that your old friend, the Abbé Surville, might be able to do something for you?"

"You?" asked Marie in surprise. "I know, dear sir, that you have nothing of your own but

a small pittance that would barely support you, if you had not an additional stipend as parish priest of St. Stephen's."

"True, dear child; but you may remember that I fell heir to six thousand francs about eighteen months ago, and, besides this, I have accumulated a similar sum from the savings of a forty years' ministry. I had placed both these sums out at interest, that they might increase, and serve as something to fall back upon when I shall be too infirm to perform the active functions of the priesthood. They are in safe and honest hands, and at this moment, Lucien, they are at your disposal."

"At my disposal!" cried Lucien. "Impossible! But any how I could not think of accepting such a sacrifice."

"How could we take from you," added Marie, "the only security you have for the comfort of your old age?"

"Am I no longer to consider myself your friend?" gravely said the good priest. "Let us look at things calmly. If I thought that you could never pay me, I could hardly help you now, for my means would not allow that. But you know very well that there is every chance in your favor. Did you not say yourself, Lucien, that with a little time to look around you, you could easily dispose of the furniture left on your hands?"

"I think so still; for the simple reason that each piece would be sold at a proper price, not being thrown pell-mell into the market; whereas, at an auction, such a quantity of things could not fail to sell at nominal prices. I should lose every thing I have, and even then my creditors' claims would be but half satisfied."

"You see," said Monsieur Surville, "that I am not making so unbusiness-like a bargain after all! Think no more about it, Lucien, but just take these notes to Monsieur Legrand to-morrow morning, and then bravely face the situation, and make the best of it. I should have made this proposal earlier, and not left you to grieve so long, had I been certain of being able speedily to draw my money from the bank where I had invested it. Thank God! all difficulty is removed now, and I shall see you all right yet."

The abbé had hardly done speaking when the whole party were on their knees before him, covering his hands with grateful kisses.

"Get up, dear children, I beg of you," he remonstrated; "you should not kneel to any one but God."

"But God sent you to us," said Marie excitedly. "How shall we ever repay your goodness?"

"By serving God, and praying to Him for me," said the good priest.

"Albéric, little darling," said the young mother, placing her child on the abbé's knee, "why can not you too thank the friend who has saved your father?"

The child, seeing his mother's face wear its usual radiant look again, seemed to understand that something good had taken place, and beat the air joyfully with his tiny hands. The priest pressed the infant to his heart, and repeatedly kissed its rosy cheeks.

"You have done more than saved my life," said Lucien; "you have saved my good name; but it shall never be said that you benefited one who was ungrateful to you for this great service. . . Still," he continued after a moment's pause, "we only want ten thousand francs, and I must ask you to take back the surplus two thousand, Monsieur."

"Not at all; you have sacrificed all to put together the half of your debt, and I will not have you leave yourselves short of ready money for current expenses; two thousand francs is none too much for that. Besides, I really should not know, at a moment's notice, where and how to invest it."

"Then," said Lucien, "there remains nothing to be done but to draw up an acknowledgment of the sum you have so generously lent us. If you will dictate what-

ever form you please, I will make it out at once."

"No, no, not to-night; let us take a little rest after the fatigues of so many days of anxiety. It will be time enough to-morrow."

The evening ended as merrily as it had begun sadly; old Madame Dalbau and Yvonne were wild with delight, and could not refrain from blessing the kind old priest who had brought their children such timely relief.

"I told you that God would watch over us, Lucien," said Marie when Monsieur Surville had left them.

"It is because I have a guardian angel ever near me," answered her husband; "and its name is Marie, my sweet wife."

Monsieur Legrand opened his eyes very wide next morning, when Lucien brought him the whole amount of the sum owing to him.

"So," he remarked in a sharp voice, "it was necessary to frighten you with the bankruptcy-court to make you pay your debts?"

"Sir," answered Lucien firmly, "I submitted in silence, when I knew that, however merciless you were, you still had right on your side; but I shall not brook an insult from you or any one else."

Monsieur Legrand signed the receipt without another word.

So peace was restored among the Dalbau household; but with it returned the leisure to think over his brother-in-law's misfortune, and Lucien often speculated on the chances of Monsieur Belmont's having been extricated from his difficulties, by some means as unexpected as that which had saved him.

Three days after the happy termination of the Legrand affair, he received a letter with an English post-mark: his heart died within him; what news did it bring? it was in his brother-in-law's handwriting. He opened it, and read as follows:

"SOUTHAMPTON, ENGLAND.

"MY DEAR LUCIEN: I should hardly dare still to call you brother, if you did not know my past life and trials. I am dishonored forever, and can not bear to remain in France. I am going to America with nothing but my brains and my hands for a recommendation, and hope to find work there, a thing now impossible at home.

"I entreat you to take charge of my little girls, poor little darlings! Madame de l'Ortal promised me not to forsake them, but I trust that you yourself will watch over them. I recommend them to my sister Marie's care. One of them is named Marie, after her. Of their mother, I will not trust myself to speak; but I should like

you to find out whether she was able to save her share of my fortune, and to sell her jewels to advantage.

"Do not pity me, brother. I have been weak-minded, and now reap the legitimate fruits of such weakness. With a little more strength of purpose, I might perhaps have averted these misfortunes. My heart craved the peaceful delights of home-life, and its affection once engaged, life is unable to steer itself against the object of its former love. Do not scorn me, Lucien, on account of the dishonor which I have involuntarily brought on my name; I should die if I thought that you would thus take away your friendship from me. If God blesses my efforts, I shall see you again soon.

"Remember me to your dear wife, and bid her pray for her poor brother: kiss your own little Albéric for my sake. Farewell, Lucien; may it not be forever!

"Your loving and unhappy brother,

"ALBERIC BELMONT.

"P. S.—Address your letters to the care of Messrs. Randolph and Co., Bankers, New-York."

"Ay, my poor Albéric, I will watch over your children," thought Lucien; "it shall be a sacred duty in my eyes."

He showed Marie the letter, and when she had read it, she glanced up at him with moistened eyes. One look, and they had read each other's hearts.

"We leave for Paris to-morrow, that is settled, is it not?" said Lucien. Marie answered by throwing her arms round his neck and bursting into tears.

"Never mind, darling," he said, "don't fret. God will bring Albéric home some day; and as for Martha, let us hope that she too will see her faults, and generously amend them."

XIV.

MONSIEUR DALBAU left his work-shop next morning in the care of his foreman, an honest and conscientious man, while old Madame Dalbau resumed the charge of Marie's work-women, a duty which the young wife had long ago undertaken in *propria persona*. Yvonne was constituted the special guardian of baby Albéric, and overwhelmed with manifold directions as to keeping the very winds of heaven from visiting his cheek too roughly; and when all these preliminaries were ended, Lucien and Marie took their places in the Paris coach.

The journey seemed long to the anxious woman, who constantly asked the conductor how many miles distant Paris was?

"There is a pretty little lady, who is in a wonderful hurry to see the sights of the capital," said the conductor to the post-boy.

"Faith, young people are mightily curious!" sagely answered the latter.

Marie had no sooner reached Paris, than she

rushed straight to her sister's house, but Martha was not there.

"Madame left a fortnight ago," said the porter; "and I do not know her address."

"I am her sister. I beg of you, tell me all you know about her."

"Ah! are you Madame Belmont's sister? Then I will tell you all. Madame Belmont thought she could save her jewels and her wardrobe; but she was not allowed to do so, nor even to recover her dowry. There is little enough as it is to divide among all the creditors: the display in this house was something terrific! Madame left the house on foot, in the plainest dress possible, she who never went out but in the carriage; but she did not say where she was going, and I know nothing about that."

"And her children?"

"Oh! *she* did not care much what became of them. They are at Madame de l'Ortal's, a good, kind lady. When the baroness came to fetch them, they were dying of the small-pox. It was not easy to take them away without exposing them to the cold air, so the baroness had their cradles well covered up and her servants carried them to her house. I was very glad, for it was dreadful to think of the poor little things being mewed up in an attic just under the roof; that is where Madame Belmont left them."

"Where does Madame de l'Ortal live?" said Marie, her voice choked with sobs.

The porter gave the address.

"Thanks," said Lucien, pressing money into the man's hand. The porter bowed low as he let them out. Marie, broken-hearted, gave way to the most dismal apprehensions. "Where can Martha be?" she said, "what has become of her?"

In vain Lucien tried to soothe her, when at last they reached Madame de l'Ortal's house, and asked to see her at once. She did not keep them waiting long; but poor Marie was so wretched that she could scarcely speak, and Madame de l'Ortal's heart went out to her as she took her hand, and answered gently after a while,

"So, madame, you are Marie of whom Monsieur Belmont spoke so enthusiastically to me? He was not mistaken in calling you a noble woman, since the misfortunes of an ungrateful, hard-hearted sister can grieve you so."

"Martha *is* my sister, madame, and what right have I to judge her? Tell me, I beseech you, do you know where she is?"

"I have not the slightest idea," said the baroness. "I did not wish to see her again. She has ruined Monsieur Belmont's happiness, the man whom I love as my own son, and I could not see or speak to her again."

"But you took charge of my nieces, madame. May I not see them?"

"Certainly. Come this way," said Madame de l'Ortal, as she led Lucien and Marie to a bedroom not far from her own. The two little girls were asleep together in a large cradle; their tiny features still bore the traces of the disease which had so nearly carried them off; still they were so pretty in their sleep, and Valentine, though so young, was already so like her mother, that Marie threw herself on her knees by the cradle, and, clasping the two children to her breast, nearly fainted with love and joy.

"Madame," she cried at last, "you will not insist on keeping these two little angels, will you? Let me take them home with me, I beg of you. They are almost my own."

Madame de l'Ortal, strangely moved by this scene, pressed Marie's hand, and, wiping away the tears that streamed down her cheeks, said, as Lucien had said once before, "Ah! why did not my poor Albéric find a Marie to love him?"

The baroness then set to work to help Lucien and his wife find some trace of Martha. It was settled that the Dalbaus were to devote a fortnight to this task, and at the end of that time, if the children were well enough to bear the journey, and no news of their mother had yet

been obtained, they were to be taken home to Rennes, and Madame de l'Ortal would undertake the necessary inquiries and keep Lucien and Marie posted as to the result.

Twelve days elapsed, with no more success than the first, though Marie was untiring in her efforts, and never drew back before the most fatiguing search. Her husband zealously helped her, but in vain. The baroness, more and more struck with such admirable self-devotion, had made up her mind that she might safely trust Marie with the care of Monsieur Belmont's children.

Two days later, Lucien suddenly came face to face with Martha's maid Celestine. He stopped her, judging that she might know the details of which he was in search. As luck would have it, she did, and to his eager questions, she answered thus,

"Yes, indeed, madame is in great trouble, she who was once so haughty and stand-offish. You will find her in a garret now, No. 7, such and such a street."

Lucien waited for no more, but paid Celestine well for her information, and rushed home with the good news to Marie, who was fast giving way to despair.

The house and street were soon found, and Marie asked nervously for Madame Belmont.

"Sixth floor, the door at the bottom of the passage," was the answer.

What a change from the luxury of the house Lucien remembered so well! They scaled the stairs, and reached a miserable garret open to the biting December wind, and where Martha lay on a wretched pallet.

Alas! she was no longer the *beautiful* Martha; her face was swollen out of all shape, and thickly covered with loathsome small-pox pimples. One comforting sight, one ray of heaven's brightness, relieved this dismal picture; a Sister of Charity sat silently at the bed-side. Her presence there proved that God at least had not forsaken Martha—that He had heard her sister's fervent prayers in her behalf.

"Martha, Martha!" cried Marie, unable to check her emotion, and bathing her sister's face with her tears, "Martha, don't you know me? I am Marie."

Martha started up with a frightened look. "Who speaks of Marie?" she said. "Marie has forsaken me like Clorinda, like Olympia. I have no one to love me now, and I must die."

"No, darling, you shall not!" said Marie, clasping her arms round her sister, "you shall not die; I am here, Martha, and I love you. Try to remember me, dear."

These gentle words seemed to bring back

Martha's consciousness. She opened her eyes, and recognized her sister and Lucien.

"Ah! do not take your revenge on me, now," she cried, "have mercy on me." And she fell back fainting on her pallet.

"Madame," gently interposed the Sister of Charity, "let her come round by degrees. I will not leave your sister, but I can not answer for her life if you stay here."

"Ah Sister! must I leave her?" said Marie, clasping her hands in entreaty.

"It is the only chance that can save her."

"I will go then; but Sister, you will stay with her night and day, will you not? And send for me, as soon as I can show myself without hurting her!"

"I will, madame," said Sister Louise gravely. Marie softly kissed her sister's brow and left with Lucien. Not a day passed that she did not go to the house to learn how Martha was getting on, and a day came at last when she was allowed to see the invalid, and tell her that a sister and a new and loving home awaited her.

For the first time in her life, Martha shed tears of genuine emotion, and three weeks later, Marie, restored to happiness as her sister was to health, joyfully made her appearance in the shop of the Rue d'Estrée at Rennes. She carried baby Marie in her arms, and was followed by

Lucien, who with one arm supported Martha, and carried the smiling Valentine on the other.

"Mother," said Marie, as she placed the twins in Madame Dalbau's lap, "I bring you two more children." Then, turning to Martha, and taking her hand, she added, "And here is one more daughter to love you, mother."

The old lady clasped both sisters in her arms, and Lucien silently wiped away a tear, while Yvonne took forcible possession of the children.

EPILOGUE.

OUR task is done. We have finished our sketch of two lives starting from the same point, and ending so diversely.

Why has Martha, so gifted with the highest qualities of mind and body, become to all save her sister an object of contempt? And Marie, humble and modest, and simple-minded as she is, why is she looked up to, and beloved by all?

Because every life can be moulded into two separate grooves. One of these is easy and pleasant; but it leads to an abyss of remorse; it is the path of worldly inclinations. And Martha, taking counsel of naught but her own pride and selfishness, followed it blindly, in the fond belief that she had chosen "the better part."

The path of duty is often hard, wearisome, and full of thorns; but peace and confidence are the guerdon of each victory obtained over self, and the more you persevere in it, the easier it becomes; for there is no consciousness so sweet as that of a duty well performed. Marie walked bravely along this path, and her reward is now

great. God has blessed her endeavors, she is happy, calm, and beloved.

Let us give one more glance at the family whose vicissitudes we have related. Four years have passed quickly by since Martha came to live with her sister. Her beauty is gone, ruthlessly effaced by small-pox, and, selfish to the last, she weeps rather for this paltry loss, than for the tarnished honor of her name; she is still indifferent to her surroundings, and careless of her children.

Let us hope that before the last solemn hour a better light will dawn on her soul, darkened as it is now by the mists of vanity and selfishness. Her children happily found a true mother in their aunt Marie; they are nearly five years old, pretty and engaging, though not as lovely as their mother once was. Valentine seems to have inherited something of Martha's callous nature, but her aunt is vigilant as well as loving.

Lucien paid his old friend the Abbé Surville long ago. His business is flourishing; and when he comes home at night, he looks with fond pride on five little childish forms, some fair, some dark; for besides his son Albéric, and his nieces, Martha's children, he is now the father of two more, a lovely little girl called Lucienne, who is three years old, and a fat, year-old boy, named Stephen.

Madame Dalbau is young in heart, and Yvonne is never happy but among her blessed children,

as she calls them. Marie is the soul and centre of the happy home. Her children worship her; her husband and mother-in-law lean upon her. The only thing that makes her unhappy is Martha's callous indifference to the fact of her husband's absence.

Albéric had not written to Lucien for an age, and the latter was getting anxious, when he received a most welcome letter, of which we will copy the concluding lines.

"I will accept your proposal gratefully. I am coming home to France, and will set bravely to work. I hope I shall be able to satisfy you, and it shall be my endeavor to retrieve, at some distant day, the lost honor of my name.

"I will be your partner, Lucien, though I am far from worthy of the position. For your sake I will endeavor never to reproach my wife for the ruin she has brought upon me. I shall be with you in a few days; I shall see my darling children; I am too happy, spite of all that has come and gone.

"Farewell, Lucien, for the present. God bless and reward you forever!"

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